MEDITATIONS

ON THE

SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR

Jesus Christ;

IN WHICH THE

HISTORY OF THE PASSION,

AS GIVEN BY THE FOUR EVANGELISTS, IS HARMONISED AND EXPLAINED.

By J. RAMBACH, D.D.

Late of the University of GIESSEN.

An Abridgment of the Work

AS FIRST TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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TO THE

Rev. WILLIAM RICHARDSON.

Dear Sir,

On this, the seventy-fourth Anniversary of your birth, I present to you the second Edition of Rambach's Meditations. *That your life and your usefulness may be still continued, is the wish and prayer of*

Your affectionate Friend and Servant,

J. G.

York, Feb. 20, 1819.

PREFACE

BY THE REV. WM. RICHARDSON, OF YORK.

TO "know Jesus Christ and him crucified," is to be wise unto salvation. This is the sum and substance of Christian doctrine, as taught by the first preachers of the gospel. The two leading blessings which Christ has purchased for men, and without which none can see the kingdom of heaven, are justification and sanctification. By the first, we are accounted righteous before God, and entitled to his favour and eternal life; by the second, we are qualified to serve God acceptably here, and to enjoy his presence hereafter. But we can neither be justified nor sanctified in any other way, than through the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. It is by a spiritual view of all he has done and suffered to atone for the guilt of our sins, that we obtain peace to our afflicted consciences; and it is by the same view that we are changed into his moral image, and become like him in our character and conduct. Hence that kind of religious instruction which sets before us, in the clearest manner, the doctrine of the cross, the character of the Saviour, and the manner in which he purchased eternal redemption for us, is the most profitable to the soul, and most conducive to its happiness and holiness. In this the Meditations of Rambach peculiarly excel. Never did the writer of this preface read a book that left upon his heart so vivid, so distinct a perception of the mind

that was in Christ Jesus; of the value, the propriety, and the use of all the circumstances of his sufferings and humiliation. The Author possesses the happy skill of setting before our eyes the whole scene in which we are so deeply interested. We see our Saviour; we seem to be present with him, to follow him into the Garden, to the high-priest's Palace, to the tribunal of Pontius Pilate, and to that of Herod. We go with him to Calvary, and behold him nailed to the cross. We hear him speak, and are struck with the meekness of wisdom which dictated all he said. We become, as it were, personally acquainted not only with him, but with his disciples, his judges, and his murderers. We gain a clearer knowledge both of the character of God and of man, and obtain a view of perfect moral beauty and excellency in the Messiah, contrasted with the deformity and imperfection of those whom he came to seek and to save. No circumstance, however minute, in the history of our Saviour's sufferings, escapes the Author of these Meditations; every thing that the Evangelists have recorded, is detailed in due order, and suggests some edifying observations.

The Reader will not fail to remark one peculiarity in the Author, and that is, the constant reference that is made to the grand Christian doctrine of atonement, in all that befel the Redeemer, not only upon the cross, but in every other circumstance that preceded his crucifixion. Thus he supposes that Christ's silence and patience under unmerited injuries and provocations, has atoned for our natural impatience and spirit of self-vindication, and his meritorious conduct in every other particular for our demerit. This extended view of the satisfaction made for human offences, certainly helps to comfort the afflicted conscience of a penitent sinner,

and to show him, how "being justified by faith," he may have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The Reader is led not only to follow the example, and walk in the steps of his Saviour, but to regard every part of his conduct through life, and in death, as expiatory. And thus the two great points of justification and sanctification, which every serious Christian has constantly in view for his soul's health, are never lost sight of by our Author.

The writer of this preface may perhaps feel too strong a partiality for this book; as it fell into his hands, and operated as a healing medicine, in one of those seasons of deep dejection and perplexity of mind, which most persons experience in the course of their Christian pilgrimage. The consolation and instruction it afforded, led him to recommend it to others. One of his judicious friends who united with him in admiring the book, but thought that it was not free from that prolixity so justly imputed to many German Divines, has taken pains to abridge it, by leaving out some parts which seemed fanciful and redundant; and comprising the whole in one volume. The present publication appears therefore better adapted than the former one, to the taste of an English reader, and more calculated for general utility in this country.

W. R.

THE AUTHOR's PREFACE.

THESE meditations are the substance of several discourses delivered by the Author at Jena and Halle, chiefly during the season of Lent, in the years 1721 and 1722. His design is, to lead his readers, from a view of the sufferings of Christ, to consider the abomination of sin, and the greatness of God's displeasure against it; till by a godly and salutary contrition, they are brought to the fellowship of their Saviour's sufferings. They are directed to seek relief to a troubled conscience, by contemplating the transcendant love of the suffering Redeemer: to look on Jesus as the propitiation for their sins: by repentance and faith to apply to themselves the obedience of Christ exemplified in his sufferings, as covering the iniquity of their disobedience: to lay hold on his meritorious satisfaction, and to implore forgiveness of sins at the Throne of Grace, on the ground of that satisfaction. Lastly, they are directed to devote themselves, soul and body, to our crucified Saviour, as his property, purchased by his precious blood; and to desire by the help of his Holy Spirit, to imitate the divine virtues, and especially the patience, meekness, and humility, exhibited in the sufferings of Christ.

J. RAMBACH.

HALLE, Feb. 24, 1730.

PREFACE

TO

THE GERMAN EDITION,

BY FRESENIUS.

ALL divine truths rest on an eternal foundation, and consequently are in themselves unalterable; but the ideas of men concerning them are subject to many changes, owing to their own weakness and imperfection. Hence it happens, that from time to time these truths have been modelled by mankind into different systems, which, if the essence of religion be preserved entire, we ought not absolutely to condemn. But such is the frailty of man, that he presumes to adulterate these eternal truths, by adding to them in some points, and diminishing from them in others; and amongst such errors we must reckon the inculcating and dwelling upon some branches of divine truth however important, to the exclusion of the rest. The doctrine of reconciliation by Christ is the most essential truth of Christianity. It is, as it were, the centre of divine revelation; to which not only all other divine truths tend, but on account of which they were revealed. The preaching of the New Testament is, in the strictest sense, "the ministry of reconciliation;" and all other sacred truths are to be represented according to their connexion with the doctrine of redemption by Christ. The influence of this doctrine on the whole Christian system, and its intimate connexion with the other doctrines and precepts of the Christian Religion, should be always inculcated. If this be neglected, the ministry of the preacher is not a ministry of reconciliation;

and his doctrines will, for the most part, be no more than a mere system of morality. But should it be asserted, that in preaching and teaching the doctrine of reconciliation by Christ, all other truths should be passed by, or only slightly noticed; to this I answer in the negative, for the following reasons.

1. Such a method contradicts the preaching of which we have specimens in the Holy Scriptures.

The doctrine of redemption by Christ is, indeed, set forth in the Scriptures as the only ground of our salvation. Nevertheless, they reveal several other divine truths, and represent the doctrines of salvation in an extensive view. Our Saviour was unquestionably the wisest and most perfect preacher that ever appeared in the world. Now if we take a view of his ministry, we shall find, that though he proclaims salvation to the lost, calls sinners to repentance and faith, and invites the weary and heavy laden to come to him; yet he also illustrates the moral law, exhorts to the practice of Christian virtues, enjoins self-denial and indifference to the world, requires the love of God and our neighbour, directs us to follow and imitate him, and, in all his preaching, adapts himself to the circumstances of his hearers. This was also the method of his apostles, who, next to Christ himself, were the most extraordinary teachers that ever appeared on earth. They, indeed, every where extol the redemption by Christ Jesus; yet, at the same time, they do not forget very zealously to set the other divine truths in a striking light, and to desire that their converts "might abound in knowledge, and in all judgment; that they might approve things, (or virtues,) that are excellent." Not a single error in principle or practice is left without animadversion.

2. This doctrine is injured, by a neglect of the truths connected with it.—For instance; what idea can we conceive of the person of our Redeemer, without the doctrine of the

divine and human natures, and of the Holy Trinity? or, how can we understand his satisfaction, without a knowledge of the divine attributes of holiness and justice, and of the transgression of our first parents? He who is ignorant, or entertains false notions of the fall, as he knows not what he has lost by Adam, so neither can he know what Christ has purchased for him. The law given by Moses, is a schoolmaster to bring us acquainted with the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. If we be ignorant of what the law requires, and of the dreadful nature of transgression, in respect to its guilt, punishment, and dominion, it is likewise impossible that we should have a right knowledge of what Christ has done for us, by his active and passive obedience. It is also useful and important to inquire into the prophecies and types, by which Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament. The believer views him as his priest, who hath redeemed and intercedes for him, as his prophet who instructs him, and as his king who governs him; as the mercy-seat to which he is to draw near in faith, and as the pattern whom he is to follow and imitate in his Christian calling. If the Scriptures speak of the death of Christ, they also record his resurrection: if they describe his humiliation, they likewise treat of his exaltation: they acquaint us with his coming in the flesh, and they foretel his coming again in the clouds of heaven. Thus we find the whole system of divine truth is connected; and that we cannot neglect one part, without injury to the whole. We arraign the divine wisdom, if we treat any of the truths which it has revealed, urged, and enforced, as unnecessary.

A faithful minister of the gospel, therefore, will adhere to that method of teaching, which continually sets forth our redemption by Christ, as it is connected with other divine truths, and will always lead his hearers to the true foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

In this class of divines, we may justly reckon the late Dr. Rambach. The grand point which he aimed at in his teaching, was the reconciliation accomplished by Christ Jesus; yet he omitted not in the pulpit and by his pen, diligently to inculcate the other parts of the Christian system. The present work, though expressly on the subject of our Saviour's sufferings, will be found to confirm this assertion. It is esteemed one of his best treatises; and, it is indisputably the best book extant on the sufferings of Christ. Whoever reads it with attention, must account it to be a most valuable jewel, which God, through this his faithful instrument, has given to his church. But there needs no long panegyric on this excellent work: it is already well known and valued; and the great benefit which has been received from it, is its strongest recommendation.

May God be pleased to grant that his blessing may continue to accompany this pious work, and out of the fulness of Christ, may he send down on those who peruse it, the power of faith and holiness.

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MEDITATIONS, &c.

PART I.

THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, AND BEFORE THE JEWISH SANHEDRIM.

1. OF THE INTERNAL SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST IN THE GARDEN AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

The Narratives of the four Evangelists harmonised.

"THEN cometh Jesus with them into a place called "Gethsemanè, where was a garden, into which Jesus "and his disciples entered. But Judas, who betrayed "him, also knew the place; for Jesus oft-times re- "resorted thither with his disciples.

"And when he was come into the garden, he said "to his disciples, sit ye here, while I go and pray yon- "der. Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

"And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of "Zebedee, James, and John, and began to be sorrow- "ful, and very heavy. And Jesus said unto them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: "tarry ye here and watch with me.

"And he went a little farther, and was withdrawn "from them about a stone's cast; and kneeled down

" and prayed, that if it were possible the hour might
" pass from him.

" And he said, Father, all things are possible unto
" thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless
" not what I will, but what thou wilt.

" And he cometh to his disciples, and findeth them
" asleep: and he saith to Peter; Simon, sleepest
" thou? Couldest thou not watch with me one hour?
" Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into tempta-
" tion: The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is
" weak.

" And he went away again the second time, and
" prayed, and spake the same words: O my Father;
" if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink
" it, thy will be done. And he came and found
" them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy,
" neither wist they what to answer him.

" And he left them, and went away again, and
" prayed the third time, saying the same words:
" Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from
" me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.
" And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven,
" strengthening him. And being in an agony, he
" prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was, as it
" were, great drops of blood falling down to the
" ground.

" And when he rose up from prayer, and came to
" his disciples the third time, he found them sleep-
" ing for sorrow. And he said unto them, Will ye
" yet sleep, and take your rest? Why sleep ye?
" Behold, the hour is come; and the Son of Man
" is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up,
" let us go! Lo! he that betrayeth me is at hand.
" Pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

A PREPARATORY PRAYER.

LORD JESUS! the author and finisher of our faith, who didst endure the pains of the cross, and embrace sorrow, when thou mightest have reigned in joy; blessing and eternal praise be to thee for thy free love, which moved thee, in our stead, to enter on the field of battle, and to obtain a glorious victory, the benefit of which all thy spiritual Israel might partake. Illuminate our eyes, that they may rightly discern the mystery of the internal agonies of thy soul, with which thou hast pleaded our cause before the tribunal of divine justice. Grant this for the sake of thy transcendent love. Amen.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCENE OF THE INTERNAL SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.

"*Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Geth-*
"*semanè, where was a garden, into which Jesus and his*
"*disciples entered. But Judas, who betrayed him, also*
"*knew the place; for Jesus oft-times resorted thither*
"*with his disciples.*"

THESE words contain a summary account,

First, Of the place where Christ entered on his spiritual conflict; and,

Secondly, Of the company who attended him thither.

I.

The place was a farm or country-house at the foot of the Mount of Olives, called Gethsemanè, either

from the oil-presses in which the olives growing in the adjacent grounds were pressed, or from the rich fertility of the soil. As the singular providence of God directed all our Saviour's sufferings, and the most minute circumstances attending them; it may be reasonably supposed to be not a mere matter of chance, that his internal sufferings happened in this place. It was,

1. A valley at the foot of a mountain, and consequently a proper scene for Christ's humiliation.—When our blessed Saviour intended to manifest his glory to three of his disciples, he led them up to a mountain;* but now, when the same disciples are to be witnesses of his abasement, he retires with them to an obscure valley. In the former case, the nature of the thing seemed to require, that it should be represented on an elevated conspicuous place; in the latter, a retired valley bore the greatest analogy to the transaction.

2. It was the "valley of oil or of fatness." This fertile valley may be a type of the spiritual fertility, which was to be the consequence of Christ's passion.

3. But the place where Christ's spiritual sufferings commenced is more particularly specified, by the addition, that it was a Garden. By this means, our thoughts may be led to the garden of Eden, the place of our unhappy fall. In a place similar to that where, by sin, we had alienated ourselves from God, that important transaction begins by which the door of communion with him was to be again opened. Where the curse was first denounced, there the foundation for obtaining the blessing is laid. Where sin first entered into the world, there also is it first expiated.

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* Matthew, xvii. 1.

Again; To this garden Jesus resorted with his disciples.—The nearer the hour of suffering approaches, the more closely ought we to associate ourselves with the children of God. The Lord Jesus, before this crisis, used to pray alone; and for that purpose generally fixed on some solitary place in a desert, or on a mountain apart:* but on the days immediately preceding his passion, if he did not pass the night in Jerusalem, he frequently resorted, with his disciples, to this place; without doubt, in order to pray, and to prepare himself for his last sufferings, which were then approaching. Thus he has sanctified to his members communion in prayer, and recommended it by his great example.

Another particular mentioned of this field of conflict was, that it was known to the traitor. "Judas who betrayed him, knew the place." This is taken notice of by St. John, probably to obviate any surmise, that Jesus went into the garden with a view of concealing himself, and of avoiding danger. The case was far otherwise: he made choice of a place with which the betrayer was well acquainted. This is a proof of the willing cheerfulness with which the Saviour entered on his sufferings. Judas knew the place; and Christ was aware that he knew it. Our Lord might easily have chosen some secret place of retirement; but his exceeding love to us, carried him to the very spot with which his betrayer was acquainted. Thus he went, like a lamb to the slaughter, prepared to meet his murderers. Here the following observations occur.

1. It is one of the aggravations of Christ's sufferings, that one of his intimate friends, who had eaten of

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* Matthew, xiv. 22, 23; Luke, vi. 12.

his bread, lifted up his heel against him. As the prophecies were fulfilled* in this circumstance, so the justice of divine retaliation eminently shows itself. Our first unhappy fall was preceded by the most flagitious perfidy: man, the intimate friend and guest of God, violated his fidelity and allegiance to his indulgent Creator. To atone for this, the blessed Jesus was permitted to suffer this afflicting incident; which, we may conclude, occasioned the severe reflections of his enemies. 'Now it may be seen, (they would say,) what manner of person this Jesus of Nazareth is; whose very disciples come to offer him for sale.' Such events are still not unfrequent in the church of God; his faithful servants and children are often betrayed by those, whom they have treated with the greatest confidence and affection. This calamity has been sanctified in the sacred person of Christ. Yet on such occasions, we may justly say, "Woe to that man by whom the son of man is betrayed" in his members.

2. A single sin, when deeply rooted in the heart, may be productive of many heinous crimes. Judas was extremely covetous. He embezzled and concealed part of what he received†. This, by repetition, became a habit; and the love of money increased to such a degree, that at last he sold his Master. Oh, that by this detestable example we may be rendered cautious! Satan does not always make use of seven cords to bind a soul‡ for destruction. One alone is sufficient for his purpose. The bulk of mankind unhappily suppose, that if they do not commit gross and scandalous crimes, they are safe; and may indulge their

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* Psalm, xli. 10, and lv. 14. † John, xii. 6.

‡ Judges, xvi. 8.

favourite sin without danger. Judas, to his unspeakable grief, found the contrary to be true. His besetting sin was avarice, and this cost him his life and eternal salvation. Such was the chain in which Satan bound the unhappy Judas. One he entangles in the snares of intemperance, another he captivates with ambition, a third with voluptuousness and secret impurity; but he leads them all to utter ruin, unless sincere conversion and repentance intervene. This should animate us with a desire to cast off the chains of the devil, and to prostrate ourselves at the feet of the blessed Jesus, with prayer and intercession that he would loose the bonds of sin, before we 'become fast bound in misery and iron.'

II.

Here also are mentioned the companions, who attended our blessed Saviour to his place of conflict. Jesus, indeed, was the chief person in this transaction; and of him it is expressly said, 'Then cometh Jesus.' He comes himself: he does not send an angel or any of his followers in his stead; for, in this important affair, no created being could supply his place, or fulfil the arduous task. He appears in his own adorable person, and fulfils the word which had long since been spoken by the mouth of David, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God!'*

1. Observe here, That the actions of our Saviour, particularly his procession to his ignominious death, should frequently be present before our eyes. We should never be wearied of reflecting on the sufferings of Christ as of a story of slight importance; but

* Psalm, xl. 8, 9.

should continually derive new strength, comfort, courage, and incitements to duty, from all the weary steps which his feet trod for our salvation. How should we be preserved from the commission of sin, if we continually set before our eyes Christ's mournful progress to a painful, accursed death!

2. In our meditation on the history of the passion, our eyes must be fixed on Jesus as the principal figure in the representation. In this passage many persons are concerned, each of whom acts his respective part; but amidst the group we are never to lose sight of Jesus. When we come to make a faithful application to ourselves of the Redeemer's sufferings, Judas, and the high-priest, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, should be, comparatively speaking, overlooked by us; that, like the disciples at the transfiguration, we may have our Lord and Saviour alone in view.* Yet though Jesus be the principal person amongst those who enter the garden, he is attended by a small company of disciples, who are to be witnesses of his sufferings. How wide the difference between the leader and his companions! Christ went forth voluntarily in obedience to his Almighty Father, out of tender love to mankind, and animated with divine strength. His disciples were all weakness, and torpor, fluctuating betwixt temerity and fear; companions fitter to increase, than to mitigate his sorrow.

3. In following the Lord Jesus, we are to prepare ourselves for a participation of his sufferings. This is pointed out to us in these words, 'cometh Jesus with his disciples.' If we acknowledge Christ, and what he has suffered for us, our resolution must be, 'let us

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* Matt. xvii. 8.

also go, that we may die with him!"* We are not to be backward or unwilling when our master shall lead us to the Mount of Olives: we must follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. If we would be his true disciples, we must prepare ourselves in his school for such difficult lessons, and with St. Paul, "desire to know him—and the fellowship of his sufferings, that we may be conformable to his death."†

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! we bless thee for that infinite love, which induced thee in thine own glorious and adorable person, to undergo the painful progress on which our redemption depended; and to retire to the garden of Gethsemanè, there to expiate the sins, which we, by our first parent had committed in the garden of Eden. Grant us grace, to preserve this thy agonizing walk in our remembrance. Inspire us with a willingness to go with thee wherever thou leadest. Preserve us from being ashamed of the ignominy of thy cross. If our flesh prove weak and reluctant, draw us after thee with the cords of thy love, that we may not remain behind, nor loiter in the path to future rest, which lies through sorrow and sufferings. Be also one day our guide through the gloomy vale of death, and animate and support us in our last combat. Be ever merciful to us, O Lord, and lead us in the way everlasting! Amen.

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* John xi. 16. † Philipp. iii. 10.

CHAPTER II.

CHRIST'S FIRST ADDRESS TO HIS DISCIPLES.

"*And when he was come into the garden, he said to his "disciples, sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. "Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*"

THESE words exhibit to us,

First, The presence of Christ at the place of conflict.

Secondly, His address to his disciples.

I.

The presence of Christ at the scene of his trial and conflict, is described by St. Luke in these remarkable words, 'When he was at the place:' that is, the place of combat. He is now actually in the garden, on the spot where, by the Father's appointment, his Son was to drink the cup of mental agony. Here something extraordinary was to be exhibited: the son of man was here to become a worm; the Creator to be lower than the creature; and the source of all consolation to be exhausted of every comfort. It was that we might no longer be what we had been before; sinners, rebels, enemies of God, and children of wrath, that Christ thus suffered. It was in our stead that he became a victim; in our stead, that he trod the dreary path of grief and anguish, that we might be brought to glory and triumph. Observe here;

A true follower of Jesus Christ must not draw back from any place, which Heaven has appointed for the

seene of his sufferings. Our blessed Lord voluntarily presented himself. He did not attempt to make his escape, nor withdraw from his heavenly Father's determination. He now calls to us, as Gideon did to his men, 'Look on me, and do likewise!'* When the providence of God leads us to any place appointed for suffering, we are not to hesitate: "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."†

Christ entered on his sufferings with a resignation, free from all backwardness or repugnancy. He was not dragged by force to the place, but came by a free spontaneous motion. O my Saviour! though the combined strength of the world could not have *forced* thee, thy unspeakable love *drew* thee to Gethsemanè. With us, alas! it is quite otherwise: to St. Peter it was said, 'Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not. ‡ Flesh and blood naturally start back at the thoughts of suffering. But as by thy readiness, O blessed Jesus, thou hast atoned for our reluctancy; may thy example impart to us strength and power joyfully to conquer our unwillingness to suffer for thy sake!

II.

In our Saviour's words to his disciples, it is observable, that his first care is about *them*, before he takes the least thought about his own particular concerns. The care of his poor flock lay nearest to the heart of the good shepherd; and 'having loved his own, he loved them to the end.' As the high-priest, in the Old Testament, bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on his breast-plate when he entered into the holy of holies, on the great day of atonement;

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* Judges, vii. 17. † Heb. x. 38. ‡ John, xxi. 18.

so this faithful high-priest, the chief of the spiritual Israel, bore his disciples on his heart, when he was about to present his supplications at the sanctuary of God.

These words of Christ intimate, what he himself was preparing to do; and also what he would have his disciples to do at this great crisis.

'Whilst I go, and pray yonder.' He intends to withdraw from them, and pray; to pour out his supplications to his Father in private. It was fitting that the most important of all events should begin with prayer. When King David, one of the express types of Christ, in his flight from Absalom, was to pass over this same Mount of Olives, it is said, 'when David was come to the top of the Mount, he worshipped God.'* On the same Mount of Olives, the Son of David also offers his prayers. The Holy Ghost had before caused it to be written concerning the Messiah by the pen of David, that in his most bitter sufferings he would look for help to the sanctuary of God. The book of Psalms exhibits the agonies of Christ under a sense of the divine wrath: "O my God, I cry unto thee in the day-time, and in the night-season I am not silent." † "My prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time!" ‡ "But I give myself unto prayer;" || or, as it may be rendered, 'I am prayer itself;' § that is, 'All that I do is to recommend my cause unto thee in prayer.' Though he had been so lately engaged in prayer to his heavenly Father, he did not think it irksome to return to that exercise; it was the element in which his soul lived. He presents himself before his Father,

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* 2 Sam. xv. 32. † Psalm, xxii. 2. ‡ Psalm, lxix. 13.
|| Psalm, cix. 4. § Et ego sum oratio.

as the oblation for the sins of the world, and the import of his prayer is, 'Lo! I come to do thy will, O God.' Hence we learn,

1. That prayer is our best employment in the hour of temptation. Did Christ himself in the affliction of his soul adopt this as an employment best suited to the occasion? Certainly then we cannot pretend to discover a better expedient. Prayer is reckoned by St. Paul as part of the spiritual panoply to be used in an evil hour.* Whoever ventures amongst the fiery darts of the wicked one without this weapon, can hardly escape unhurt. But alas! it is a frequent error of the children of God, to be so anxious about human means in their distress, as utterly to forget this best expedient. It is true the Almighty seldom stretches out his arm from heaven to relieve his distressed creatures in an extraordinary manner, but makes use of men as his instruments. Yet, let us beware of seeking relief from these, so as to exclude prayer and reliance upon God; a fatal error, which cannot be avoided with too much circumspection.

2. As public or united prayer has its particular promises and blessings; so personal and private prayer is sometimes not less necessary and beneficial. Christ himself has afforded us an example, that one must not supplant the other. He had prayed with his disciples, and in their presence,† and now he pours out his supplications alone. We ought therefore to do the one, but not to leave the other undone. It is proper that families should perform their public devotions together morning and evening; but it is likewise necessary that besides this united sacrifice of prayer, each individual should pour out his heart to God in

* Ephes. vi. 18. † John, xvii.

private,* and with the simplicity of a child, converse with his heavenly Father.

Our Lord further intimates what he would have his disciples do at this important crisis.

'Sit ye here,' says our blessed Lord. At the same time, we may suppose, he pointed to a place, perhaps at the entrance of the garden, where his disciples were to stay. The like circumstance occurs at the intended sacrifice of Isaac.† These words are particularly addressed to eight of his disciples, who possibly might be the weakest, and the least capable of beholding his dreadful agonies. He therefore directs them to remain at a distance; but the other three disciples he takes along with him, that they may be nearer his person, and be eye-witnesses of his sufferings. Hence the following observations arise.

1. It is not adviseable for a servant of God, when under sufferings, to lay his heart open indiscrimately to all. Christ did not allow all his disciples to be present at his inward agonies, but directed the greater part of them to keep at a distance; well knowing, that they might be offended by a nearer view of his unspeakable anguish and agonizing conflict. The children of God, when under severe sufferings, and especially when pressed by violent inward trials and temptations, sometimes cause pious souls to fall and be offended; so that under such circumstances, some caution is necessary, nor ought they to disclose inadvertently the secret motions and anguish of the heart to every by-stander.

2. It is a sign, that we are not yet mature for

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* Matt. vi. 6. † Genesis, xxii. 5.

sufferings, when we are allowed to stand at a distance, and view the sufferings of others. A Christian should consider his exemption from the cross, not so much as a sign of God's particular favour, as of his own weakness. If we would become worthy to bear the 'marks of the Lord Jesus,' we must be diligent in the use of those means which will fortify us to endure temptations and sufferings.

Our Lord further says, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Christ would not have them to be indolent, or to fall asleep; but to join in prayer with him, though absent. He directs them to pray, that their prayers might guard them against an approaching temptation. Prayer is doubtless the most effectual preservative in these seasons. It is the breastwork with which we must defend ourselves on the approach of trials. Hence we infer:

1. Under trouble and affliction we are not to withdraw from God; but to approach nearer the throne of grace. They, who attend to the secret workings of their souls, must have observed, that in a crisis of trouble, Satan endeavours to divert them from prayer; so that even good men are apt to neglect it. But their consciences afterwards sting them with remorse, and the tempter himself reproaches them for the omission. The attacks of Satan are most dangerous to those who, instead of resisting, suffer him to use his utmost efforts, and unconcernedly wait the issue. When pressing troubles, or the unwilling flesh, would deter us from the duty of prayer, we should resolutely enter upon it, in the divine strength, imploring an effusion of the spirit of supplication.

2. Christ's intercession, and that of our fellow-christians, does not exempt us from the duty of per-

sonal prayer. Our blessed Lord prays for his disciples, yet he enjoins them to pray for themselves likewise. When others pray for us, they are to pour forth their supplications with as much zeal and fervour, as if we did not pray at all; and when we pray ourselves, our petitions should be offered with the same earnestness, as if the weight of the duty rested wholly on *us*.

3. Prayer is not to be deferred till the trial has actually overtaken us, but must be used as a preservative to ward it off. It is one of Satan's devices, to reduce us to a careless security before temptation; to render us cold and lifeless in our petitions for relief when we are under its pressure. If he can thus bind our feeble hands, he is sure to carry his point. Let us then be vigilant and on our guard. Let us set before our eyes the blessed Jesus praying most fervently, and we shall derive resolution and strength from his example.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! unfeigned thanksgiving and praise be ascribed to thee, that by thy petitions as our high-priest, thou hast sanctified prayer, and imparted to it an efficacy by which we may combat the assaults of our spiritual enemy. May thy Holy Spirit incite us to prayer when an hour of trouble approaches, that we may not be remiss in arming ourselves with this powerful weapon, when the enemy is preparing to assault our souls. And do thou, blessed Jesus, assist us with thy prevailing intercession; that our weak imperfect prayers may be sanctified, and rendered acceptable to the Father for thy sake. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEGINNING OF CHRIST'S SORROWFUL ANGUISH.

" And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee,
" James and John, and began to be sorrowful, sore
" amazed, and very heavy. And Jesus said unto them,
" My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry
" ye here and watch with me."

THESE words describe the sorrow and anguish of our Lord Jesus: We observe,

First, The persons who were present; and

Secondly, The intenseness of our Saviour's sorrow.

I.

The spectator of the sorrow and anguish of Christ were Peter, James, and John, the three principal disciples. The first was Peter, who had before professed such intrepidity, and had set himself above the rest of the disciples, saying, " Lord I am ready to go with thee both into prison, and to death; though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will not I." Accordingly now the trial approaches, and he must be present at this extraordinary transaction. Here, amidst these perturbations and agonies of our blessed Lord, he had an opportunity of approving his courage and resolution. Hence St. Peter styles himself " a witness of the sufferings of Christ."* After him follow James and John, who are here called the sons of Zebedee; probably in reference to the

* 1 Peter, v. 1.

question which on a former occasion Jesus had put to them, 'Are ye able to drink of the cup which I shall drink of?' when they readily answered, 'we are able.'* Here, therefore, they had an opportunity of giving a proof of their boasted fortitude. Whilst the rest of the disciples were to remain at some distance, perhaps at the entrance of the garden, these were permitted to attend our Lord, not only that they might be witnesses of his agony, but possibly, that he might receive comfort by conversing with them. The other disciples we may suppose were within sight; from them the transaction was not concealed, but there was some difference in the degree of knowledge imparted to them. The three favoured disciples were probably endued with a greater portion of strength and grace. We know from the evangelical history, that on extraordinary occasions our Lord had these disciples near his person; as when he raised Jairus's daughter to life,† and at his transfiguration on the Mount.‡ They had then seen the majesty of Christ displayed in its greatest glory, and they were now to be witnesses of his lowest debasement and humiliation. Hence we remark,

1. The wisdom of God usually proportions our temptations to our respective degrees of strength. He gradually enures his weaker children to the cross, and frequently permits them to view for a time the conflicts of others, before they themselves are engaged in the battle. This wise and gracious discrimination our blessed Saviour observes in the instance before us. The disciples who followed him, were a poor, illiterate set of men. None of them were yet prepared to

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* Matt. xx. 22. † Luke, viii. 51. ‡ Matt. xvii. 1.

endure sufferings for his sake; and therefore it was provided that they should not at that time be brought to the trial. Again; some amongst them were weaker than others. The weakest he stations at a distance: those who were somewhat stronger, he takes along with him, and in some measure admits to a fellowship in his sufferings. It is said, "he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able."* This œconomy he alone understands, who searches the heart, and tries the strength of every individual; and therefore we are to acquiesce in his dealings, without expostulating or saying with Peter, 'Lord but what shall this man suffer?' † Otherwise we shall receive the same answer, 'What is that to thee? follow thou me.'

2. In severe trials and temptations, it is not adviseable to desire solitude. Christ might not stand in need of his disciples on his own account; but, by taking some of them to be near him, he probably intended to recommend and sanctify social relief in distress. They judge amiss who, under severe temptations, rely on their own strength; and slight the discourse, consolation and prayers, of other good men. To such may be addressed the advice of Solomon; "Two are better than one; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." ‡

3. The greatest and severest spiritual trials often happen to those whom God has either already highly

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* 1 Cor. x. 13

† Ουτος δε τί. The English translation renders it, 'What shall this man *do*.' John, xxi. 21.

‡ Eccles. iv. 9.

favoured, or intends to employ on some important occasion. These three Apostles had been with Christ on the holy mount, before they attended him to the mount of Olives. They are called "pillars;"* and were afterwards employed in extraordinary transactions. Peter led the way in declaring the gospel message to Jews and Gentiles.† James was the first of the Apostles who sealed the truth of the doctrine with his blood.‡ John was to survive all the disciples, and to be favoured with sublime revelations of the state of the church of God to the end of the world.—These disciples, therefore, were admitted to a nearer view, a more intimate knowledge of their master's mental sufferings than the rest. In like manner, Abraham, who was appointed by God to be the Father of the faithful, passed through such trials, as, in the judgment of Luther, not one of his descendants would have been able to bear. St. Paul, who was most eminently distinguished and blessed in his apostolical office, laboured and suffered more than all the other apostles. The great reformer, Luther, was likewise prepared for his important work by great and arduous trials.—Most of us would wish, without labour or conflict, to attain to a high degree of holiness, and be made illustrious instruments in the hands of God; but this must not be; the favours of God are dealt only to those whom he has tried and approved.

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* Gal. ii. 9. † Acts, ii. and x.

‡ Acts, xii.—He is supposed to have suffered martyrdom in the fourth year of Claudius, and the forty-fourth of the vulgar æra.

II.

The vehemence of the sorrow and anguish of our Lord, as described by the Evangelists, was such, that he both felt it inwardly, and likewise discovered it by his words.

1. That the internal sorrow of the blessed Jesus was very bitter and vehement, appears from the language of the evangelists. He began "to be overwhelmed with sorrow, to be sore amazed;" which word in the original, denotes the most painful anguish, depression, and terror. * As man, in whose stead this sacred person offered himself, consists both of soul and body, so his representative was to suffer in both.

2. He discovered this anguish by his words: "Jesus said unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me." The chief seat of agony was his soul, which was now, as it were, hemmed in with sorrow, like a city pressed on all sides by an enemy. Thus the Messiah in the book of Psalms is introduced, pouring forth his complaints; "Innumerable evils have compassed me." † And this sorrow was "unto death," because either it was great enough to have broken his heart, or because it would not cease till death put an end to it.

He requires his disciples to watch with him, that they might be witnesses of his agony, and arm themselves against the trial which was coming on them.

Christ in the internal sufferings of his soul, is to be considered as bearing the sins of the whole world, and the wrath of God, in our stead. Our eyes must be en-

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* Ἐκθαμβεισθαι. † Psalm, xl. 12.

lightened by the Holy Ghost, to view him in his sorrows as the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." * Other martyrs have gone cheerfully to tortures and death; whence then arises such sorrow and trembling here? Is this chief of martyrs more timorous and faint-hearted than they? Is he afraid of contempt, or of death? God forbid! But he was to suffer a death not yet divested of its sting; whereas the death of saints and martyrs has beforehand lost its sting in Christ. God placed him, as it were, at his judgment-seat, and caused him to feel that dreadful wrath which burns to the lowest hell. He had nothing before him but God's awful tribunal, and the horrible imagery of all the sins, past, present, and future, of the whole race of mankind. This circumstance is to be improved,

1. For promoting a salutary contrition and sorrow. Behold, wretched man! thou committest innumerable sins with pleasure, yet the Son of God was to expiate them with inexpressible pain. Let the greatness of his sorrow teach thee how horrible sin must be, which could provoke the righteous God to inflict such rigorous punishment on his only Son. What thou seest him endure, thou thyself must have suffered. With this anguish and sorrow thou wouldest have been oppressed for ever. And, indeed, all this agony, in an eternity of darkness and torment, awaits those sinners, who do not, by repentance and faith, become partakers of the benefits of these sufferings. Forbear, O sinner, to heap up those treasures of wrath, which an infinite and omnipotent God will inflict upon

* John, i. 29.

thee, if by this agony of his Son thou art not moved to sorrow and repentance.

2. For promoting a true and lively faith. Behold! thou who hast a sincere hatred against sin; thy transgressions lie on the head of that sacred victim, the Lamb of God. They are included in the heavy load which oppresses him. They have no more right in thee; fear not, thou shalt never be required to atone for them. God is not unrighteous to demand of thee a debt, which his Son has generously discharged. Acknowledge thy wickedness; acknowledge that thou didst occasion this sorrow to thy Saviour. By his extreme anguish he has procured for thee a title to everlasting felicity. As thou never wouldest have had cause to rejoice either in time or eternity, if Christ had not endured this for thee; so now, not even under the cross hast thou occasion to continue in sorrow, if thou standest in the faith of Christ.

3. For promoting a cordial and unfeigned love to the Lord Jesus. Who will not love him, who, from the free impulse of his exalted love, underwent such sorrow and anguish for our sakes? The more painful to him was his love towards us, the more ardently should it constrain us to love him and to suffer for his sake.

4. For a powerful source of comfort under trials and afflictions. Tempted and afflicted soul! confide in thy merciful high-priest, who, from experience, knows thy distress and trouble; and having himself been touched with thy infirmities, knows how to help and support thee. In thy sorrow and dread of God's judgments, there is intermixed a sinful repining; but he bore his inexpressible anguish without murmuring

or impatience; and by his blameless and undeserved sorrow, he has covered the spots and imperfections which accompany thy sorrow, so that they shall not be laid to thy charge at the divine tribunal. When thou art under anguish of mind, remember the agony of thy mediator; and be confident, that as certainly as he did not sink under it, but was supported and finally delivered, so certainly shalt thou again lift up thy head with joy, and by his sorrow become entitled to everlasting joy and peace.

PRAYER.

All praise and thanksgiving be rendered to thee, O adorable Jesus! for the anguish and heaviness with which thy soul submitted to be oppressed! May we enjoy the fruits of thy sorrow, during our lives, and particularly at the tremendous hour of death; that we may walk without fear through the gloomy vale, which thou hast sanctified by thy blessed footsteps. Grant this for the sake of thy love to mankind. Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR SAVIOUR'S PREPARATION FOR PRAYER, WHEN OPPRESSED WITH SORROW.

"*And he went a little farther, and was withdrawn from* "*them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and fell* "*on his face to the ground, and prayed, That if it were* "*possible, the hour might pass from him.*"

THESE words exhibit to us our Saviour's preparation for prayer in his agony. In which we may observe,

First, His attitude.

Secondly, The purport of his prayer.

I.

As to the attitude of our Saviour during his prayer and conflict; it is observable,

1. That he withdrew from his disciples; for it is said 'he went a little farther.' At first he was in company with his eleven disciples; afterwards he chose three of them, whom he took along with him, leaving the rest behind. To these three he made known the sorrow and anguish of his soul. And now he also left these and retired from them, though but a short distance, so that he would probably be within their view; and by the light of the moon, then at the full,* they might discover how he was em-employed. But it is soon afterwards said, that he "withdrew from them about a stone's cast." This denotes a still farther removal, intended to prevent

* The Passover was usually at the time of the full moon.

his disciples from taking offence at his extreme sorrow, and to enable him more freely to pour out his heart before his heavenly Father. He was seized by vehement anguish, overpowered, and as it were, impelled forward. This retirement suited our blessed Lord's present situation, when he would plead with his heavenly Father. Now his most faithful friends were to stay behind; for in this important crisis no created being could afford him any assistance.

2. 'He kneeled.' St. Luke says, "that he kneeled down," bent his knees down to the ground. We find it recorded of other holy persons in scripture, that they prayed kneeling, as Solomon,* Ezra,† Paul;‡ Solomon was a king, Ezra a priest, Paul a prophet or teacher. But he whom we here behold kneeling, was at once king, priest, and prophet. *They* were dust and ashes, and their honour did not suffer by their kneeling in the dust; but here the Lord of heaven and earth kneeled, to whom "every knee shall bow."

3. "He fell on his face to the ground." What a spectacle is here! The only Son of the Father lies prostrate in the dust. When David besought God for the life of his child, he lay all night on the ground;§ here, we behold the Son and Lord of David, lying with his face on the ground. Hence we are taught,

1. That the reconciliation of fallen man was to be attended with circumstances quite opposite to those of his revolt. The fall was occasioned by the most audacious presumption; man refused to be any longer

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*2 Chron. vi. 13. †Ezra. ix. 5. ‡Acts, xx. 36.
§2 Sam. xii. 16.

subject to or dependent on his Creator, but would at once, as it were, climb up to heaven; and would, had it been possible, have dethroned that God, before whom the angels veil their faces. In the commission of this crime all was arrogance and presumption: in the expiation of it nothing is seen but humiliation and abasement. When any aspiring or presumptuous thoughts arise in us, let us think of the debased Jesus, with his body extended on the earth, and humbling himself, like a worm, before Divine Justice.

2. The inward awe and reverence, with which we should be filled in prayer, must show itself outwardly in a reverential posture. The Son of God, whilst pleading our cause with his Father, kneels on the ground; why then are our knees so stiff and inflexible, that they do not bend before the supreme Majesty of heaven, when we are addressing him in prayer? This indeed is not the essential part of devotion; yet where the heart is possessed with real humility and reverence it will certainly show itself outwardly. A bold, careless or familiar behaviour in performing this duty, is too common.

3. The followers of Christ may fall into such circumstances that they must relinquish every expectation of comfort in the creature. Christ himself, the Head and Captain of the church militant, was in his sufferings, destitute of all human comfort. But we may learn from these words, "I am not alone; for the Father is with me,"* that we have a God, with whom, in an hour of desertion, we may converse with reverential intimacy.

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* John, xvi. 32.

II.

As to the purport of the prayer, it is said, "He prayed, that if it were possible, this hour might pass from him."

The expression, 'He prayed,' is often repeated in this history; as if the evangelists wished us to notice the prayer of the Lord Jesus. The more his sorrows pressed upon him, the more he persevered in prayer to his Father, and humbled himself before the offended Majesty of heaven. When our Saviour at the beginning of his ministry was tempted by the devil, the last and most audacious assault was made in these words: "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down, and worship me." Christ, having repelled the attack with—'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,' the tempter departed from him: but as St. Luke remarkably adds, 'It was for a season.'* He now returns again in the gloomy hour of trial, and renews the temptation. But Christ, in this instance also, continues true to his Father, and worships God only.

What was the purport of our Saviour's prayer? "That if it were possible, this hour might pass from him." He calls the sufferings allotted to him, and of which he had already a foretaste, an HOUR.† It had before been said, "His hour was not yet come."‡ But now it was come, as our blessed Lord himself says in his prayer, 'Father, the hour is come.' This was indeed an important hour, set apart in the eternal decrees of God for the sufferings of his Son; an hour, or time which the Spirit in the prophets had long

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* Luke, iv. 13. † John, xii. 27.; xiii. 1. ‡ John, vii. 30.

before signified;* an hour which our blessed Lord had before his eyes, and expected, as a woman expects the hour of her travail. It includes the whole torrent of sufferings with which his feeble humanity was to be overwhelmed, the insults, pain, and death he was to endure: but it more particularly denotes the present hour of his inward agony, his anguish of soul; when the floods of God's wrath were discharged on him; when he stood before the Divine tribunal as the greatest of criminals, bearing the sins of the whole world.

Concerning this hour, he prays, 'that it might pass from him.' The desire of being freed from pain, or at least of receiving some mitigation of it, is in itself a natural and blameless affection; a state of suffering being what human nature was not originally designed for. Christ was not liable to suffering, but by his voluntary submission; for he had not the least taint of sin. But our miseries moved him to suffer for us; and he felt the accumulated burden in such an oppressing manner, that he was constrained to seek some alleviation. It does not however appear that he petitioned his Father, that all the sufferings he was to undergo might pass from him, as it has been sometimes expounded; but that he might obtain, in the present hour of extreme inward anguish, an abatement and shortening of his agony.

He further adds, 'If it be possible;' that is, if it can be done consistently with thy holiness and justice, and without breaking thy pre-established decrees. Such was the purport of our Saviour's prayer; and we may learn from it,

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* 1 Peter, i. 11.

1. That oral prayer is by no means to be neglected or undervalued. Some persons, pretend to say, we ought only to pray mentally; and that it savours of superstition, to think that we either stand in need of words to give utterance to our prayers, or are bound to set apart certain times for this duty. But these evasions are invalidated by the example of Christ himself. Prayer requires a separation from the world, and serious recollection of our scattered thoughts, which are dissipated by the labour and hurry of business. It is indeed proper and necessary at all times to lift up our hearts to God, and to walk as in his sight; but this does not supersede the use of oral prayer; whoever neglects it will gradually find himself estranged from God and religion.

2. Christianity does not consist in a stoical insensibility under afflictions, but in an humble submission and resignation to the will of God. The world is apt to imagine, that Christians are devoid of feeling or sensibility; but here we see, in the very highest example, that 'no chastisement for the present can be accounted joyous.' It is true the men of the world may calumniate us on the opposite side, and say, "we thought you Christians had despised suffering; we see that when touched, you murmur and complain like others." Christians cannot, however, but feel the pressure of their present burden, though they may possess their souls in patience under its weight.

PRAYER.

THANKS be to thee, O Saviour, that thou hast borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and wast tempted

in all things as we are, though without sin. All praise be to thee for thy deep humiliation in prayer, by which thou hast atoned for our proud disdain, and left us a perfect example. Favourably look upon us in the hour of trial; and may we arm ourselves with prayer, and by the strength of thy victory be conquerors in all things! Amen.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS IN HIS SORROW AND ANGUISH OF SOUL.

"And he said, Abba, Father! all things are possible unto "thee. If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

THESE are the words of our Saviour's prayer in his sorrow and conflict.

"And he said, Abba, Father."

As to the appellation of Abba, it is to be observed,

1. That the word Abba, in the Chaldean translation of the Old Testament, is never used to denote a civil title of respect and honour, but a real and natural father.

2. That it is particularly used by children, as an expression of tenderness and endearment, and had long before been typically uttered by Isaac, a lively type of Christ, when he was going to be sacrificed by his Father.* For though Christ is here a victim under the sentence of the wrath of God; yet he penetrates through the darkness which surrounds him, and calls God his Father. And this he does in a sense too sub-

* Gen. xxii. 7.

lime for any of the sons of men to repeat it after him; he having in his divine nature derived his origin from the Father by eternal generation, as well as in his human nature obtained the dignity of his Son by adoption.

We proceed to the petition itself. "If it be possible, remove this cup from me." The Lord Jesus previously lays down a fundamental truth, namely, that "all things are possible" to God; but the sensible influence of the divine effulgence being for a time obscured, he was not able clearly to perceive the decrees of heaven, or to know how long the infliction of his wrath should continue; he therefore adds, "if it be possible," if this prayer can be granted consistently with thy eternal decree. After this dutiful resignation to the will of his Father, he proceeds in these words, "Let this cup pass from me," according to St. Matthew; or as it stands in St. Mark or St. Luke, "Take or remove this cup from me." In the illustration of this passage, two cautions are particularly to be observed. The one is, that we do not lessen the sufferings of Christ; and the other, that no sinful imperfection or unwillingness be attributed to him. For if the least criminal wish, or sinful disposition, had had any place in Christ, he would himself have been subject to the penalty of the law, and consequently could not have redeemed us from its curse. It was necessary for him to be without the least taint of sin, like Adam in his state of innocence.

A difficulty arises as to the right meaning of the phrase, 'this cup.' Christ in general calls his whole passion a cup,* according to the usual phraseology

* Matt. xx. 22.

of the scriptures;* and therefore many commentators are of opinion, that Christ by this expression is, for the moment, deprecating his whole approaching passion, his agony, and death itself; yet in such a manner, that he immediately recollects himself, and acquiesces in the divine will. But Christ had already foretold to his disciples the principal parts of his outward sufferings,† and consequently had fully resolved to undergo them. And further, his petition must have been of such a nature that he might conceive it possible to be granted; whereas the removal of all his external sufferings was absolutely impossible, without frustrating the whole work of reconciliation. Again; it must have been a petition in which he was heard,‡ which cannot be said if he prayed for the removal of all his sufferings in general. These circumstances oppose the common exposition of the text.

By the cup, therefore, we are rather to understand the present excruciating sense of the wrath of God, and the withdrawing of the sensible and comfortable assistance which, at other times, his human nature used to derive from the divine. Hence all the evangelists express it "*This*" cup. All the other cups of his passion he was most willing, and ready to drink;§ but this cup which he now first began to taste, in which were poured the dregs of the wrath and curse of God, was so extremely bitter, that his spotless but feeble humanity shuddered at it. Hence he cries out, 'Let this cup pass from me;' in which words he seems only

* Isaiah, li. 17.; Jer. xxv. 15.; Psalm, lxxv. 9.

† Luke, xviii. 22.

‡ "He was heard in that he feared." Heb. v. 7.

§ John, xviii. 11.

to pray for a shortened duration of his inward agony; that it might soon pass from him, and that the dreadful tempest of the divine wrath might quickly blow over and be hushed. We may observe,

1. That Christ was tempted in various conflicts and trials. though without sin, that he might have compassion on those who are tempted.* This affords a sure ground of consolation to a soul under temptation. When the mind is depressed, the eyes must be fixed on the immaculate Lamb of God, who also felt the same affliction; but preserved a filial confidence in his Father. He knows how to bear with his distressed members, and to succour them in those temptations, with which he was himself exercised.

2. It is to Christ and his meritorious sufferings that we owe the privilege of being allowed to pray for an abatement of our sufferings. Never can God lay so much upon us as we deserve. With our sufferings, there are intermixed the impatient and disobedient motions of the will: nor should we have had any right to pray to God either for shortening the duration, or abating the pressure of our sufferings, had not an innocent and holy person, who deserved no punishment, presented himself to suffer in our stead.

Lastly, The conclusion of the prayer is, 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.' The Father's will, and the will of Jesus Christ, though different, were by no means opposite; as in Christ himself, the will of his divine and human natures were different, yet so that the human will was in a holy subjection to the divine. His human will felt the anguish which

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* Heb. ii. 17, 18.

arose from the divine displeasure. Therefore, our Saviour seems to say; "My human nature has, indeed, some aversion to suffering, particularly at present, when the sense of thy wrath presseth me sore; so that, if it be consistent with thy will, I could wish to be soon delivered from this agony. But if it be thy will, that I should bear this load of mental suffering still longer, and drink of this bitter cup to the last drop, I heartily submit to thy sentence, and desire nothing but that, 'thy will may be done.'

Here the third petition of the Lord's prayer is truly performed and consecrated by the sacred lips of our Mediator and High Priest. It was his desire that his Father would not judge of him from his present state of pain and anguish, but according to the thoughts of his heart, in which the law of his Father was written.* Under all these violent temptations, the will of Christ continues submissive, and at length rises superior to any reluctancy. It is a filial, not a forced submission, accompanied with a confident reliance and resignation; so that his love to the Father remains undiminished. Hence let us learn,

That the submission of the human will in Christ to the divine, is an important article both of his propitiatory sacrifice, and of the great example which he has left for our imitation. Christ in this sacrifice of his will, is to be considered as a Reconciler atoning for our opposition to God and his will. Alas! how frequently on any contrariety betwixt God's will and ours, the former is set aside, and our own sinfully preferred! Even the children of God, especially when under temptations and trials, feel in themselves the remains

* Psalm, xl. 8.

of this deeply rooted evil. Herein appears the force of original sin, displaying itself in an enmity against God and his ways. This should convince us of the necessity of a Reconciler, that our inward resistance against the will of God, which alone would be sufficient to condemn us, may be forgiven, and our enmity against God be mortified, by the appropriation of Christ's ransom. When we partake of that blessing, and when our minds are enlightened and taught to look on God as a Father in and through Christ, then we learn according to our Saviour's perfect example, to address our heavenly Father from the heart, saying, "Not mine, but thy will be done."

PRAYER.

To thee, blessed Saviour, thou tempted and merciful High Priest, all praise and thanksgiving be ascribed, that thou hast been pleased by the sacrifice of thy will to make satisfaction for, and expiate our enmity against the will of God. Be pleased, by virtue of this thy propitiatory offering, and through the influence of thy Holy Spirit, to purify and regulate our corrupt and unruly wills, and to restore them to that state of conformity to the divine will in which they were at first created; that so it may be our meat and drink to fulfil the will of thy Father, and to resign ourselves to him. Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION OF THE DISCIPLES.

"And he cometh to his disciples, and findeth them asleep; "and he saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? What, "could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and "pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit in- "deed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

THESE words relate the first visit of Christ to the disciples; and describe *first*, their condition, *secondly*, our Lord's address to them.

I.

Their condition is exceedingly wretched, and deserving of pity. It is said, 'He came to his disciples and found them sleeping.' Their visitor was the suffering and agonizing Jesus, who was now enduring the effect of God's wrath, and was about to plead our cause before the tribunal of heaven: in all his agonies, he watched over his poor unthinking followers, that they might not fall into the hands of the tempter. Having accordingly poured out his heart into his Father's bosom, and offered up his own will to His, he returns to visit his three disciples, Peter, James, and John.

The condition in which he found them was very improper at such a crisis: they were sleeping. It was with them as with the ten foolish virgins, who, when the bridegroom delayed his coming, all slumbered and slept.* It is true it was late at night, so that their

* Matthew, xxv. 5.

eyes were heavy; but this was doubtless owing in some measure to the tempter, Christ having before said that Satan desired to sift them like wheat. We may suppose the blessed Jesus to have been greatly affected on finding his most intimate friends in a state so unsuitable to that awful crisis. Hence we learn,

1. That it should be esteemed a singular benefit, when God by the visitations of his grace rouses the lethargic soul from its spiritual security. The disciples were probably loth to have their repose disturbed, but it was the greatest kindness which their Lord could do them, at a moment of such imminent danger. We should likewise acknowledge it to be a sign of the tender love of Christ to our souls, when he does not allow us to indulge in sloth; when he visits us by the secret reproofs of his Spirit; when he disturbs our sleeping consciences, and rouses us from a false security. Woe to that man with whom the Spirit of the Lord no longer strives; who is buried in insensibility; whose heart does not smite him, when he commits any action displeasing to God. These are melancholy signs of approaching obduracy. O blessed Jesus, thou great Shepherd of Israel, keep a watchful eye on our souls!

2. We have in Satan a subtle enemy, who knows how to make use of all opportunities. The disciples were now tired and dispirited, and it was late at night. The tempter avails himself of these circumstances to lull them to sleep! It behoves us then, to be continually on our guard.

3. Drowsiness, sloth, and indifference in religious duties, are the usual forerunners of a great fall. It was so with the unhappy disciples; for soon after, Peter denied his master, and the rest forsook him and

fled. When therefore we perceive in ourselves such dispositions as these, it should alarm us, and make us fearful lest we should be entering on a path which, unless we retreat in time, will plunge us in perdition.

4. God's children are not the less in danger of falling into heinous sin, after having experienced an extraornary spiritual revival. The tempter never watches the soul more closely, than after it has received some particular favour from God. The fall of the disciples was now drawing very near; but it was preceded by frequent visits from the Lord Jesus. Before Peter denied his Master, he had been visited, awakened, and warned. Man must therefore be convinced, that his fall is not to be imputed to God. He previously gives sufficient grace; he uses due precautions for preserving the soul; and if a fall happen notwithstanding his care, we ourselves must bear witness that it is to ourselves, and not to him, we are to impute it. To think otherwise is to charge God foolishly, and to make him the author of sin.

II.

The discourse of our blessed Saviour is addressed, first to Peter in particular, and then to the other disciples in general.

The particular address to Peter is this: "Simon! sleepest thou?" Peter had, above all the rest of the disciples, made a show of great courage and resolution, and had promised that with Christ he would go to prison and to death. The Lord Jesus, therefore, first turns to him, and reminds him that this lethargy little agreed with his sanguine promise; and that he set but an indifferent example to his brethren. As if he had

said, "Ah! wretched Simon, where will this end? If thou canst not on my account, break thy natural rest for a short time, how wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? If thou art not faithful in matters of small consequence, how wilt thou be faithful in those of greater moment?" Hence we learn,

1. That the greater promises we have made of fidelity to Christ, the more sensible reproaches must we expect if we do not acquit ourselves accordingly. The arrows of Christ's reproof are chiefly pointed at Peter, who had given him the greatest assurances of fidelity. Of him who has promised much, much will be required; and if it be not performed, the clamours of conscience will be the more importunate. Let us reflect how many vows of holy obedience we have made in the course of our lives, and how few of them we have fulfilled. Whither should we fly to save ourselves from shame and grief, were our consciences to set all our perfidy and baseness before our eyes!

2. Whoever cannot deny himself in small matters, will be much less able to do it in those of greater consequence. This our blessed Lord intimates to his drowsy disciple, by reproaching him with his sleep. He that cannot bear a frown, a hard word, a reproachful name, for the sake of Christ, will scarcely stand his ground, when he is called upon to give up his life for the sake of the Gospel.

As to the speech addressed to the disciples in general, it contains,

1. A reproach. "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" In St. Mark, these words are indeed spoken to Peter; but this is easily reconciled with St. Matthew's account. Undoubtedly his eyes were fixed on Peter; but he speaks to all the other disciples, and

upbraids them with their slothfulness. "Had ye then not *strength* enough (as the Greek word expresses it) to watch with me one hour*? You, who have arrogated to yourselves sufficient strength and resolution to die with me†, have shown, that ye have not strength enough to watch with me a single hour. Formerly, when employed with your nets, you could pass whole nights without closing your eyes;‡ but now you are to watch with me, you are overpowered with sleep. You have not been able to watch one single fleeting hour with me, your Lord and Master, whom on account of so many kindnesses conferred, and such affectionate love and tenderness shown, you are bound faithfully to assist in this his extreme anguish."

2. An admonition, with proper motives.

The admonition is, "watch and pray." By watching, the snares of the devil are discovered and avoided; by prayer, we seek the protection of Providence. By the former, danger is discovered; by the latter, assistance is obtained. Christ recommends both duties to the disciples who were sleepy and indolent: as if he had said, "What is past shall be forgiven you; but for the future be cautious, and amend." To this admonition are annexed two motives.

The first is taken from the greatness of the danger: "that ye enter not into temptation." A greater temptation was now approaching them; a trial in which they were to prove their fidelity towards their Lord and Master, and put in practice that lesson, which they had hitherto been learning in his school. As this trial was now at hand, they were, by watching and prayer, to keep on their guard, that they

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* Ουτως ουκ ισχυσατε. † Matthew, xxvi. 35. ‡ Luke, v. 5.

might not be surprised. We are not to expect in answer to our petitions, a total exemption from trials; these are often sent to teach us our own weakness; but we may hope by prayer to obtain strength from on high to support them.

The second motive is taken from their weakness and inability. Our blessed Lord allows, that in them "the spirit is willing:" he grants that it was their intention faithfully and courageously to stand by him; but at the same time reminds them, that "the flesh is weak." They had still within them the corrupt nature, which loves itself, and is for preserving itself in an unlawful manner; which lags behind and retards the spirit, when it would proceed with vigour and activity. Their intention was good, but their own natural strength was unable to execute it: they needed that divine succour, which is to be obtained by vigilance and prayer. Hence we infer:

1. That the heart of man is so wholly corrupt, that it is inclined to sloth and indolence, not only under the enjoyment of God's favour, but also under his chastisements. These three disciples had before fallen asleep on Mount Tabor,* and now also in the garden of Gethsemanè. Alas! is it not lamentable that we should be so unfeeling, and so addicted to sloth, that neither the mercies of God, nor his corrections, can rouse us?

2. That which is innocent, and even commendable in itself may be sinful under particular circumstances. Though sleep be lawful, and the night was given for man to rest, yet the disciples are justly

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* Luke, ix. 32.

reproached for indulging in sleep at an emergency like the present.

3. In strong temptations, the surest preservative is vigilance, united with prayer. Hereby the sting of the temptation is blunted, and the enemy disarmed. Hence St. Paul, among other parts of the spiritual armour, recommends, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."* If we were more careful to use these heavenly weapons, the enemy would not obtain so many victories over us; we run to and fro, and seek assistance, whilst this simple remedy prescribed by the supreme physician, is often neglected.

4. In our conflicts against sin, good resolutions alone do not determine the issue. If we content ourselves with these, or if we go forth relying on our own strength, without seeking to God for assistance, we shall be overcome before we are aware. Hence Luther observes, that "the road to hell is paved with good resolutions."

5. The weakness of flesh and blood should not induce us to look on Christian duty as impracticable, but should rather drive us to prayer for divine assistance. Many misapply these words of Christ, 'The spirit is willing,' as an excuse for not watching and praying; whereas it is, *because* 'the flesh is weak,' that Christ exhorts us to these duties, as the appointed means of obtaining strength from above.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! who like a watchful shepherd, visitest thy careless sheep, and warnest them of ap-

* Ephes. vi. 18.

proaching danger; may we, when inclined to sloth, hear thy pastoral voice sounding in our ears, 'Watch and pray.' Grant to each of us a just sense of his inability and weakness, that we may not rely on our own strength or good intentions, but be diligent in prayer for obtaining thy succour, and by thy strength may be conquerors in all things. Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISCIPLES VISITED AGAIN AFTER OUR SAVIOUR'S SECOND PRAYER.

"*And he went away again the second time, and prayed,*
"*and spake the same words: O my Father! if this cup*
"*may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will*
"*be done! And he came and found them asleep again,*
"*for their eyes were heavy, neither wist they what to*
"*answer him.*"

HERE are described the continued internal sufferings of Christ; and,

First, The repetition of his prayer;

Secondly, His coming back to his disciples.

I.

The repetition of his prayer is described in these words, and "he went away again, and prayed." This going away refers to what had been said before, "he came to his disciples." Having awakened and exhorted them to watch and pray, he again went some paces from them, and a second time sought a retired solitary spot. Again he prostrated himself before the throne of his Heavenly Father, and poured into his

bosom the sighs of his oppressed spirit. We observe, here,

That prayer must be continued without ceasing. Notwithstanding our request be not granted, we are yet to persevere. What our blessed Saviour taught, namely, "that men should always pray and not faint,"* he has here confirmed by his illustrious example. He had already prayed, that the duration of his inward sufferings might be shortened, but he received no answer; yet that does not discourage him from renewing his addresses. Thus he has acquired for us the privilege of making repeated supplications to God for the same favour. With what timidity does Abraham address the Divine Being, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak!"† But now through Christ we may boldly approach the throne of grace. Unwearied perseverance in prayer is not only our privilege, but our duty. Let us then, by our importunity, do, as it were, holy violence to heaven; and though our prayers be not immediately heard, let us not be weak in faith, but say with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." And like the woman of Canaan, let us cry after the Lord, until he show us a token of mercy.

As to the substance of the second prayer, it occurs,

First, In general; for St. Mark tells us, "He spake the same words." Our blessed Lord does not seek for any elegant change of language; but by constantly retaining the same expressions, he shows his fixed and unchangeable desire. We must not think that by dint of eloquence we can persuade an omniscient God: humility, and poverty of spirit, will

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* Luke, xviii. 1. † Genesis, xviii. 30.

most powerfully prevail in drawing down Divine aid in time of need. What comfort must it be to a Christian under temptation, to reflect that even his inarticulate sighs and inward groanings are accepted by his heavenly Father, who perfectly knows his wants!

Secondly: St. Matthew relates the words of this second prayer; whence we see that they are exactly of the same import with the first. "Oh, my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done!"

In persevering in prayer, we are always to show an humble resignation to the good pleasure of God. In this second prayer of the Lord Jesus, there appears even a greater resignation and sacrifice of his own will to that of his Father, than in the first. *There* it is said, "If it be possible, remove this cup from me;" but *here*, "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done!" By continuance in prayer, his resignation increased; and thus it will be with us. When the mind first forms a a wish for any thing, and requests it of God, it is often strongly bent on obtaining it. But God may see fit to deny our requests. Thus we are taught patience and submission to the divine will; and when we can say, "thy will be done!" then God vouchsafes to hear us.

II.

We are now to consider our Lord's second coming to his disciples.

"He came again." After providing for his own affairs, (which indeed, were also the universal concern of the whole race of mankind,) he returns again to his disciples. Christ is here found in fashion as a man.

Persons under great afflictions go to and fro; and cannot stay long in the same place.* All these actions of feeble humanity, Christ took on himself, yet without sin. However, it was not only on account of his own trouble and anguish, but likewise from a tender love for his disciples, that he went so often to inform himself of their situation.

The condition of those he visited was very wretched. He found them again sleeping. Something is intimated, by way of extenuation of their fault:—"for their eyes were heavy;" or weighed down with sleep. Sleep and fatigue had so overpowered them, that when they were roused from their lethargy, they could scarcely recollect themselves. Sorrow had clouded their minds. Therefore, as St. Mark adds, "They wist not what to answer him." Hence it appears, that our blessed Lord again spoke to them, and exhorted them to prayer and watchfulness. We may suppose, with what pity and compassion the blessed Jesus beheld this melancholy scene. We do not read of any harsh reprimand from him, but he acts conformably to the prophecy of Isaiah, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench."† We remark,

1. That to indulge their convenience and ease, at a time when the Saviour is suffering, must be highly unbecoming the people of Christ. He now no longer suffers in his own person; but in his mystical body, the church, and in his members, he is often afflicted and distressed. The sleepy disciples represent those careless persons, who do not lay to heart the sufferings of the church militant. St. Paul calls on us

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* See St. John, xiv. 31. † Isaiah, xlii. 3.

to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them who suffer adversity, as being ourselves also in the body." * Dost thou dwell in a house of cedar? Reflect with David, "That the ark of the Lord dwelleth within curtains." † Hast thou rest from all thine enemies? Yet in spirit go with the host into the field. Does the world caress thee? Think that thy brethren meet with the worst usage from that false friend. If the daughter of Pharaoh own thee for her son, choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. ‡ In a word, by all means take care, that thou be not one of those whom the prophet describes, saying, "They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches—but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." §

2. It is dangerous to give way to spiritual sloth. The disciples, who had not roused themselves at Christ's first exhortation, afterwards sunk into deeper sleep. Sloth, and a disinclination to good, insinuate themselves like intoxicating poison, and gradually deprive the mind of all thought and reflection.

3. The effects of trouble on our animal frame, ought to be distinguished from the workings of inward corruption. The Holy Spirit here describes the melancholy condition of the sleepy disciples with compassion. "Their eyes were heavy;" and they had an oppressive load on the heart. The like apology occurs also in another place, "Sorrow hath filled your hearts." ‖ Christ attributes their lethargy to sorrow, and pities his disciples, for "he knew their frame." **

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* Heb. xiii. 3. † 2 Sam. vii. 2. ‡ Heb. xi. 24.
§ Amos, vi. 4. ‖ John, xvi. 6. ** Psalm ciii. 14.

From him a minister of the gospel must learn, how to deal with afflicted souls; not bruising them by unseasonable severity, but raising them by gentle means, and the application of well-grounded comfort.

PRAYER.

O merciful Jesus, thou faithful High Priest, who treatest thy people with such infinite compassion; we lament that our corrupt nature is so inclined to evil, and so slow to good, that we often leave thee, in thy members, afflicted and sorrowing, whilst we indulge in sloth and indolence. Of thy tender mercy, forgive us this neglect; by thy example, animate our hearts with devotion; by thy persevering constancy, impart to us perseverance in prayer; and by the often repeated sacrifice of thy will, incline our stubborn wills to submission. Grant this for the sake of thy sufferings. Amen.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRIST'S AGONY AND CONFLICT.

"*And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the* "*third time, saying the same words: Father, if thou be* "*willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my* "*will, but thine be done! And there appeared unto him* "*an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being* "*in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat* "*was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to* "*to the ground.*"

HERE is described the third part of our Saviour's conflict, in which we observe, *first*, The repetition of

the prayer. *Secondly*, The Lord Jesus visited and strengthened by an Angel. *Thirdly*, The increase of his agony and conflict; his fervent prayer, and bloody sweat.

The circumstances of this transaction are peculiarly interesting: we will consider them distinctly, and suggest meditations suitable to each particular.

1. As the blessed Jesus, at his second coming to his disciples, could not rouse them from sleep, it is at last said, "and he left them." A melancholy circumstance indeed! It was as if a skilful and good physician should sit down by the bed-side of a patient, and entreat him for his own sake to forbear a noxious diet or regimen; but at length, finding him deaf to his precautions, should be obliged to go away, and leave the obstinate patient gratifying his depraved appetite. Alas! how desperate and fatal must the disorder be, when this great spiritual physician gives up the diseased soul, and ceases to strive with the sinner!

O blessed Jesus! preserve us from such a condition, in which all thy admonitions and warnings are lost! In thy tender mercy forgive us, who have so often suffered thee to knock at the door of our hearts in vain; who have so often either not admitted thee at all, or by obstinacy and perverseness obliged thee to withdraw. Henceforth may we pay greater regard to the awakening visits of thy grace, and with joy welcome thee as the blessed of the Lord.

2. Yet at the same time how consoling is it, that though it be said, 'he left them,' he did not cast them away! He still owned them as his disciples, and did not discontinue his solicitude and care for them. How faithful, how mild, how loving is the blessed Jesus, and how patient with weak, indolent, and wretched offenders!

O thou mild and gracious Saviour! extend to us thy patience and compassion. When we feel the weakness and frailty of the flesh, and sink under our burdens, cast us not away, but be present to support and succour us, and continue thy sacred influences on our souls.

3. "He went away again, and prayed the third time." How carefully does the Spirit of God enumerate the precious sighs of our High Priest, which he poured out in the anguish of his soul into the bosom of his Father. This the Psalmist had predicted, when he introduced the Messiah speaking in this manner, "Put my tears into thy bottle; are they not in thy book?"* Our sufferings are far inferior to those of the Saviour; but as he vouchsafes to sanctify them by his intercession, our heavenly Father condescends to notice and record our penitential sighs.

O blessed Lord! may we send up our continual prayers to thee, knowing that they are noted in the book of thy remembrance. Are the hairs of our head numbered, and wilt thou not much more take account of those sighs and tears which are produced by thy Holy Spirit?

The Lord Jesus prayed thrice, that the cup of his sufferings might soon pass over. Paul likewise prayed thrice, that the messenger of Satan might depart from him; and at last obtained for answer, that God's "grace was sufficient for him."† Let us "ask until we receive, seek until we find, and knock until it be opened unto us."

4. "And he spake the same words." How fixed and determined is the Lord Jesus in his prayer!

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* Psalms, lvi. 8. † 2 Cor. xii. 8.

Thanks be to thee, blessed Saviour, who by thy constancy in prayer didst atone for our inconstancy and weariness. When oppressed with temptations, and at a loss in what language to address thee, let thy Spirit plead for us with sighs unutterable.

5. " And he said, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt!" How bitter must be the cup of the divine anger, since our blessed Lord prayed thrice that it might be removed!

O Lord and Saviour, how could we then have borne what thy human nature could scarcely bear! Would not this load have pressed us down to the abyss of hell, if thou hadst not in our stead taken it on thee, and borne its oppressive weight! Eternal thanks be ascribed to thee for drinking the dregs of the cup of God's anger, that the pure waters of his comfort might be plentifully poured into it for us. We will therefore take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.

6. " And there appeared unto him an Angel from heaven, strengthening him." How must this Angel have been amazed at the abasement of his Creator! With what humility must he have adored the purity and holiness of God, in this stupendous transaction.

Blessed Jesus! as the Angels with admiration delighted to behold thy stupendous love to mankind, grant that we may also with gratitude and wonder behold the amazing transaction. May thy bitter passion be the frequent subject of our meditations!

How deeply we behold the Saviour abased! The Son of God is here beome lower than the angels. The beloved Son is afflicted; and his ministering servant comforts and supports him.

O blessed Lord and Saviour! thou didst so descend in thy humiliation, that we stand afar off, and wonder at thy stupendous love. Praised be thy name, that thou didst stoop so low, as to stand in need of the consolation of an angel, that by thy merits we might enjoy the service and protection of those blessed spirits, against the assaults of the powers of darkness. Give us, we pray thee, such consolation and strength in all our conflicts, that we may obtain the victory. When the sons of men forsake us, let thy holy angels surround us, and thy blessed Spirit assure us of thy love.

The angel strengthened our Saviour, most probably by bringing to his remembrance the consolatory promises of his heavenly Father, that he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied: that his sufferings should be attended with the most transcendent and salutary effects, to the glory of God, and the eternal salvation of an infinite number of souls. And the Father undoubtedly accompanied these words of his refulgent messenger with such efficacy and power, that the human nature of our blessed Lord was greatly strengthened.

Thus, O our Saviour, may we be favoured in our difficulties and distresses with the visits of such pious Christians, as may support us by their consolatory discourse. Give to the words of thy messengers and servants such force and energy, that we may be sensible that thou hast sent them to strengthen and support us.

Again; This comfort administered to our blessed Lord appears as it were, the granting of his prayer, and a gracious recompense of his voluntary sacrifice of his own will to the will of God.

May we be convinced by this illustrious example, that it is not in vain to possess our souls in patience;

but that a new portion of grace follows on every sacrifice of the will.

The cup, indeed, was not removed from the blessed Jesus, for the bitterest dregs of it were still reserved for him. Nevertheless his prayer was not ineffectual: for by the consolation of an angel, in the name of his heavenly Father, he received a pledge, that he should not sink under his sufferings.

May we be content, when, instead of that which we ardently prayed for, something much more beneficial is granted; or when we receive only an earnest of the divine favour. Let us always be satisfied with present comforts, and patiently wait for further relief.

7. "And being in an agony." What a dreadful spectacle here offers itself. Life struggles with death: not with temporal death, that not being yet inflicted; but with eternal death, with the wrath of God, the terrors of the Almighty, and the assaults of all the malignant powers of darkness. In this arduous combat, the curse of the law, and the innocence of the victim; the manifestation of divine justice taking vengeance, and of divine love melting with pity; the malice of Satan, and the love of the Redeemer, appear in astonishing contrast.

Since every sin deserves death, what must have been the sufferings of Jesus, who had the intolerable weight of the unnumbered sins of the whole world, pressing upon his soul! We behold the beloved Son of the Father, so overwhelmed by the vials of God's wrath, that his human nature appears as if in the excruciating pangs of death. What an accursed thing must sin be, which caused this depth of misery! How dreadful to the guiltless soul of the Saviour, when all the curses and agonizing torments, denounced by the law against

the sins of the whole world, were inflicted on him! Eternal praise be ascribed to thee, O Saviour! for permitting thyself thus to be accused and punished before the just tribunal of God. Let this thy atoning conflict preserve us from the curse of the law. As thou hast taken on thee the curse, let thy blessing descend on our guilty heads.

Again—In this dreadful encounter, the devil may be supposed to have exerted his utmost efforts against our blessed Lord; yet the divinity which resided in his human nature, prevented it from being subdued by the prince of darkness. Though Satan discharged all his fiery darts against the soul of Jesus, his divinity extracted their poison, and rendered their attacks ineffectual. Thus the rage of the powers of darkness was so baffled, that henceforth none of their envenomed darts will be able to hurt the souls of believers.

Unfeigned thanks be ascribed to thee, O Most Mighty, who in this encounter, hast deprived of his strength the strong man armed, who had the power of death, even the devil. Evermore preserve us, that we may no longer serve a tyrant, over whom thou hast gained so glorious, so painful a victory; but may acknowledge thee our victorious Redeemer, for our only Lord and Master. Above all, give us the shield of faith, that we may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Undoubtedly, this agony of our Lord was increased by his tender concern for the loss of so many thousand souls, who he foresaw would give themselves up to the enemy of God and man, and tread underfoot the precious blood by which they were purchased and redeemed. If a patriot, in order to free his country

from miserable slavery, should generously devote his life; and yet should foresee that out of thousands groaning in captivity, a large proportion would refuse to be freed from chains and wretchedness, and choose perpetual slavery; would not this affect his generous and heroic soul, more than even the sacrifice which he made for their sakes? How great then must thy love have been, O my Saviour, when, though thou didst foresee the ingratitude of so many souls who would thus voluntarily run into perdition, thou wast still resolved to accomplish the painful work of our redemption. O preserve us, that to us at least, this thine agonizing conflict may not have been in vain.*

8. "And he prayed more earnestly," or properly "more intensely." As the agony increases, the more humbly and ardently we see the Saviour approach the tribunal of God's justice.

9. "And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood." What agonizing sorrow must that have been, which caused such a supernatural sweat!

O blessed Jesus! we here behold in thee wonders beyond comprehension. We would abhor those sins, which occasioned thee such unparalleled anguish: and with thankfulness, admire the ardour of redeeming love, which caused thy blood to flow so freely.

10. "And they fell on the ground." Alas! shall such precious drops fall to the ground? O let us open our hearts, that they may be moistened with this sacred, this heavenly dew! Let us sprinkle the posts

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* Quærens me, sedisti lassus,
Redemisti, crucem passus,
Tantus labor non sit cassus!
Dies Iræ.

of our doors with the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, that the destroying angel may pass over!

In thee, blessed Jesus, we have redemption, and in thy blood the forgiveness of sins. Thou hast rolled thy garments in blood, that in this free and perennial fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, our sins which are as scarlet, may be washed white as snow. Thanks be to thee for the unspeakable benefit!

CHAPTER IX.

JESUS COMES THE THIRD TIME TO HIS DISCIPLES.

"*And when he rose up from prayer, and came to his "disciples the third time, he found them sleeping for "sorrow. And he said unto them, Will ye yet sleep, "and take your rest? Why sleep ye? Behold the hour "is come; and the son of man is betrayed into the hands "of sinners. Rise up, let us go! Lo! he that betrayeth "me is at hand. Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*"

In these words are related Christ's third visit to his disciples; their condition; and his discourse to them.

I.

"He rose up from prayer, and came to his disciples." By the disciples are here to be understood, not merely the three whom he had admitted to be near his person; for as his enemies were now near, he undoubtedly came also to warn the other disciples. The true Shepherd, in his bitterest agonies, retains a tender concern for his poor defenceless sheep.—In the preceding chapters, several inferences have been already deduced from this subject; some points of instruction still remain.

1. A Christian must not so give himself up to prayer, as to neglect the duties of love to his neighbour. Christ has not only, by his regularity and fervour in prayer, atoned for the wandering and coldness of our petitions; but has likewise taught us that this duty should not encroach on those of a relative and social nature. He arose from prayer, when the situation of his disciples called for his presence.

2. When we have received grace and strength from God in prayer, we ought to impart it to our neighbours. Christ having in his prayer been strengthened by an angel, is desirous of animating his disciples. The strength which we derive from prayer is not only to be made use of for our own support, but we must communicate a portion of it to our weak brethren; for by such a faithful use of our spiritual strength, it will receive an abundant increase.

3. Inward trials and temptations ought not to render us selfish, morose, and careless of our neighbour's welfare. The blessed Jesus in his inward sufferings had the sins of the whole world, and the wrath of God, laid on his sacred shoulders; yet we see that he does not relinquish his care and solicitude for his disciples, but, "having loved his own, he loveth them unto the end."

4. After exerting our *faith*, in prayer, there can be no better employment than that in which our *love* is exercised. This we observe in our Lord Jesus Christ, not only on the present, but on other occasions; as after praying, he delivered Peter and the other disciples from danger in a storm:* after praying, he healed the lunatic.† Christ is to be con-

* Matt. xiv. 23. † Luke, ix. 29, 37.

sidered both as expiating our frequent dissipation after prayer, and as the great exemplar whom we are to imitate in the due performance of that duty.

II.

As to the condition of his disciples, "he found them sleeping for sorrow." Christ in his severest sufferings, was left without help or comfort from his friends, perhaps to expiate the excessive confidence, which we in our distress place in men, and especially in friends or relatives. It was indeed no small aggravation of the sufferings of Christ, that in his agony he had not only no conversation with, and comfort from his disciples, but likewise found that all his efforts to rouse and awaken them were to no purpose. This circumstance ought however to afford comfort to those, who find themselves abandoned by the world, and left without human succour, in a season of calamity.

Though the disciples are compassionately excused, because they slept for sorrow; yet did they not go without a reproof: "Why sleep ye?" They did not strive against the sorrow with which they were oppressed, but gave themselves up to it without resistance: on the contrary, the more violent the grief which oppressed the soul of our blessed Lord, the more earnest were his prayers, and the greater his struggles.

III.

Our Saviour's words, at his coming the third time to his disciples, contain,

1. A reproof: "Will ye yet sleep and take your rest?" As if he had said; "Will you sleep away the small remainder of time left you for securing your

souls? At another time I willingly left you to take your natural rest, but now the time is too precious for this indulgence. Now, as you see me struggling and bleeding with agony, it becomes you to drive away sleep from your eyes, and be vigilant. Therefore arise; why sleep ye?"

2. He gives them notice of the approaching danger, which at first he intimates in general. "The hour is come;" the hour which the Father has appointed for my sufferings; the hour which I told you of before, is now come. "Behold! the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." By the word 'Behold,' our blessed Saviour would rouse their attention to the danger which was before them. But what were they to see? The Son of man was to be delivered up. Hitherto Christ had stood before the supreme tribunal of God's justice; now was he also to be delivered into the hands of men.

But our Lord particularly adds, "Lo! he that betrayeth me is at hand." By this betrayer he means the perfidious Judas, though without mentioning his name. He was now at hand, approaching at the head of the officers of justice, in search of Jesus, in order to deliver him into their hands.—After this follows,

3. A twofold exhortation.

The first is, "Rise up, let us go!" By these words, the Lord Jesus shows his willingness to present himself to his enemies, according to the decree of his Father. The strength which he had derived from prayer, appears from his willingly submitting to the sufferings, which now presented themselves to his view.

The second exhortation is, "Pray that ye enter not

into temptation." This warning, which Christ had before given, and which has been already illustrated, he again repeats for the last time. As the temptation was now ready to overtake them, he would have them to arm themselves with prayer, and by this means guard against a surprise. Hence we learn,

1. That the neglect of a duty, or the commission of a sin, is the more culpable, at a time when it is most incumbent on us to exert ourselves. The lethargy of the disciples during Christ's former conflicts, was not without sin; but the continuance of it when he was in his agony and bloody sweat, and when the danger was at hand, was still more criminal. Hence our Lord says, "Will ye still sleep?" Sensual indulgences are at all times offensive to God; but the guilt of them is aggravated if they be indulged in by one, who from his character and office ought to be careful and sober, and to walk unblameably; and, if indulged in too, at a time when the troubled state of the church denotes that divine judgments are impending, and that we should repent in dust and ashes. *

2. When we have unhappily wasted much time, the rest of our precious moments ought to be carefully redeemed, and usefully employed. This our Lord intimates to us in the question, "Will ye yet sleep?" When there is but a short time for the dispatch of an important affair, a prudent man makes the most of every moment. We have the most weighty business before us, a preparation for eternity. How much time have we already lost! Oh, let us well improve the remaining moments; and as Peter (after he had recovered from his shameful lapse) exhorts, Let us

* See Numbers, xxv. 6, 7, 8.

" no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." *

3. When one hour of suffering is past, we must hold ourselves in readiness for another conflict. The inward agony of Christ was already past; now he speaks of another hour that was coming on, of which he afterwards says, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." Our blessed Saviour thus would teach us that we should never think ourselves secure. Though we have overcome one temptation, another may unexpectedly present itself. Skilful mariners after weathering out a storm, immediately repair the vessel and tackling, that they may be able to ride out the next gale. Thus should we prepare for fresh trials and temptations.

4. To imagine that temptations or judgments are at a distance, renders a man careless and remiss. The wicked man is thus described by the Psalmist, " Thy judgments are far above out of his sight." † And whilst men cherish such vain delusive thoughts, they slumber and sleep, like the foolish virgins in the parable. Christ, on the contrary, earnestly calls upon us, telling us, that " the hour is at hand." The Apostle Peter says, that " the end of all things is approaching." St. Paul affirms, that " the day of the Lord is nigh:" and St. John forewarns us, " Little children, it is the last time." Happy is he, who by so many concurrent voices, and awakening calls, is roused to vigilance and active exertion.

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* 1 Peter, iv. 2. † Psalms, x. 5.

PRAYER.

To thee, O Lord and Saviour, be ascribed endless thanks for thine internal sufferings, and for the care, which amidst thy sorrows, thou didst manifest for thy disciples, and for all those who should believe in thee through their word. May the remembrance of thy bitter agony, and the transcendent love, which was exemplified by thy sufferings, never be absent from our thoughts. Prepare us cheerfully to undergo any suffering for thy sake; and may we never account our lives dear to us, so we may finish our course with joy. Amen.

2. OF THE EXTERNAL SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

The Narratives of the four Evangelists harmonised.

"AND while he yet spake, behold, he that was "called Judas, one of the twelve, having received "a band of men and officers from the chief priests "and pharisees, came, and with him a great multitude "with swords and staves, lanterns and torches, from "the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the "people; and he went before them. Now he that "betrayed him had given them a sign, saying, whom-"soever I shall kiss, the same is he; take him, and "lead him away safely.

"As soon as Judas was come, he went forthwith "to Jesus, and said, hail master, master! and kissed "him. And Jesus said unto him, friend, wherefore "art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of man with "a kiss?

"Jesus therefore, knowing all things which should "come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, "whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Na-"zareth. Jesus said unto them, I am he. And "Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them. "As soon as Jesus had said unto them, I am he, they "went backward and fell to the ground.

"Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And "they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have "told you, that I am he: If therefore ye seek me,

" let these go their way; that the saying might be
" fulfilled, which he spake, Of those whom thou hast
" given me, have I lost none.

" Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and
" took him. When they who were with him, saw
" what would follow, they said unto him, Lord shall
" we smite with the sword? And behold, one of them
" who were with Jesus, namely, Simon Peter, having a
" sword, stretched out his hand, and drew it, and smote
" a servant of the high-priest, and cut off his right ear:
" the servant's name was Malchus.

" But Jesus answered, and said, Suffer ye thus far.
" And he touched his ear, and healed him. Then said
" Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath;
" for all they that take the sword shall perish with
" the sword. The cup which my Father hath given
" me shall not I drink it? Thinkest thou that
" I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall pre-
" sently give me more than twelve legions of angels?
" but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that
" thus it must be?

" Then the band, and the captain, and the officers
" of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him. And Jesus
" said unto the chief-priests and captains of the temple,
" and the elders who were come to him, Are ye come
" out, as against a thief, with swords and staves to take
" me? I was daily with you teaching in the temple,
" and ye took me not: But this is your hour, and the
" power of darkness. And all this was done, that the
" scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

" Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And
" there followed him a certain young man, having a
" linen cloth cast about his naked body, and the young

" men laid hold of him; and he left the linen cloth, " and fled from them naked."

A PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, who not only didst plead our cause before the tribunal of Divine justice, and bear the displeasure of thy heavenly Father; but also wast contented to be delivered into the hands of cruel men, to be buffeted, mocked, and scourged; enlighten our eyes to contemplate the wonders of thy love, patience, and tenderness, in thy external sufferings: may we lay hold of thy merits by faith, and be disposed cheerfully to tread in the steps of thy passion! Amen.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST TO APPREHEND HIM.

" *And while he yet spake, behold, he that was called Judas,*
" *one of the twelve, having received a band of men and*
" *officers from the chief-priests and pharisees, came, and*
" *with him a great multitude with swords and staves, lan-*
" *terns and torches, from the chief-priests, and the scribes,*
" *and the elders of the people; and he went before them.*
" *Now he that betrayed him had given them a sign, saying,*
" *Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is he; take him, and*
" *lead him away safely.*"

THESE words describe the coming of our Lord's enemies to apprehend him. We have an account given,

First, Of their leader,

Secondly, Of his attendants,

Thirdly, Of the instruments with which they were furnished.

I.

As to the leader of Christ's enemies it is said; "while he yet spake, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came." The coming of the traitor is thus connected with the preceding words, in which Christ had warned his disciples against sleep, and, amongst other motives to vigilance, had made use of this: "Lo! he who betrayeth me is at hand." While he spake, Judas, and his party were approaching. The ringleader of this multitude is more particularly described,

1. By the high dignity, which he enjoyed. He was "one of the twelve;" and consequently a chosen apostle of Jesus Christ; who had conversed with this his Lord and Master above three years; had seen his miracles; and had even preached the gospel to others. This man had gradually suffered selfishness and avarice to take such entire possession of him, that he went over to our Lord's enemies, and from being an apostle, become a base perfidious betrayer of his Master. To denote this dreadful fall, St. Matthew and St. Luke introduce their narratives of the circumstance with a note of admiration, frequently used by the holy penmen; "Lo! Behold!" Thus was fulfilled the prophecy in the Psalms; "Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me." * He is also distinguished

2. By his name, Judas; or, as St. Luke expresses it, "he that was called Judas." Nothing could be more opposite to the signification of the name than his perfidious character; for he was not a confessor, as the

* Psalms, xli. 9.

name imports, but a denier and betrayer of Jesus Christ.

3. By the place which he assumed among the band of our Saviour's enemies. "He went before them;" having placed himself at the head of this armed multitude: hence he is called "the guide to them that took Jesus."* He might however advance some paces before the rest, that he might not appear to act in concert with them.

4. By the sign he makes use of. "He that betrayed him had given them a sign." Here the right appellation is given to this traitor, who, in consideration of the pieces of silver which he had received of the chief-priests, engaged to deliver into their hands the person of his Lord. As the Roman soldiers, who were to seize the blessed Jesus, did not know him personally, proper care was to be taken that they should not mistake the person, and instead of the master, lay hold of one of the disciples: the traitor had therefore concerted with them, that he would point out the person of Christ by a certain sign; and he made choice of a kiss, a symbol of love and friendship, and used among the eastern nations as a form of salutation between friends on their meeting. "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he whom you seek, take him and lead him away safely." As if he had said, 'all my business is to deliver him up to you; if you suffer him to escape, the blame must lie at your door: I shall have done my part, and cannot in any event be expected to return any of the money, which I have so well deserved.' Thus he probably might think he had managed mat-

* Acts, i. 16.

ters with great cunning and sagacity; that the disciples would not know that this salutation of Jesus was intended to betray him; and that as to his master, he would find means to make his escape, and to pass through the midst of his enemies, as he had done more than once before.* In the mean time, Judas hoped he might safely appropriate to his own use the thirty pieces of silver. We may here observe,

1. It is a sign of our corrupt nature, that we are more apt to be moved by the apprehension of outward and bodily danger, than by the admonitions of God and his Holy Spirit. How often had our blessed Saviour warned his disciples to watch; yet they were deaf to his awakening calls, and continued to indulge in sleep. But now, their enemies being in sight, they were roused. This is frequently the case. To reclaim sinners from the evil of their ways, God gives them repeated warnings in their consciences, by their ministers or friends, but without effect. At length he sends some calamity or misfortune, or visits them with a dangerous or mortal sickness. Then it is that they first come to themselves; open their slumbering eyes, bewail their mispent life, and make promises of amendment.

2. God does not usually surprise any man with judgments, till friendly admonitions have been disregarded, and the respites of indulgent grace neglected. The disciples were allowed several opportunities to have recovered from their lethargy; but as they did not make use of these, they were suddenly surprised, and had scarcely time to recollect themselves. Hardly had

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* John, viii. 58.; Luke, iv. 30.

our blessed Saviour given them his last exhortation, when the armed multitude was in full march towards them! Thus the human race before the deluge, had first a respite of a hundred and twenty years; after which, no amendment or reformation ensuing, 'all the fountains of the great deep were broken up.' * Such is the case also in our days. We see the judgments of God executed on particular nations or individuals, yet no one lays them to heart. Voluptuousness, sensuality, and wickedness of every kind increase, and the kind warnings and awakening calls of God are disregarded. We may without difficulty conclude what will be the issue: that his spirit will not always strive with man. The divine chastisements will at length be poured down like a torrent; and those sinners who now imprudently delay their repentance, may probably be taken so unexpectedly as to have no time for recollection. O that we may better employ our season of grace, and rightly improve the present opportunities!

3. There is no office or character so sacred, as to be secure from the assaults of satan. Even among the apostles, there was a thief, † a traitor, ‡ nay a devil. §— What office can be more sacred than that of a bishop or minister? Nevertheless antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition, has insinuated himself into the sacred office, and thus hath "seated himself in the temple of God." ‖ Therefore, let no one pride himself, and be lulled into security, on account of the sacredness of his office; but in order that satan may not gain an advantage over him, let him watch, and "not be ignorant of his devices."

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* Genesis, vii. 11. † John, xii. 6. ‡ Matthew, x. 4.
§ John, vi. 70. ‖ 2 Thess. ii. 4.

4. The vices of men ought not to be charged to their office or situation in life. Judas was one of the twelve. Now on the fall of a person so distinguished by the divine favour, we may suppose the general cry would be, "See of what description of men are these apostles of Jesus of Nazareth, who pretend to superior sanctity of life and purity of manners." But if this was really said, who will assert that such scoffers, who judged only according to the appearance, judged righteous judgment?—With regard to the vices of persons in the ministerial office, two errors may be committed:

The one, in attempting to excuse or vindicate their faults, though they are notorious to the world; wishing their vices to be concealed or overlooked, in order to save the credit of the ministerial office. How can the credit of the office consist with its being made a cloke for wickedness and vice? Is it not much more to the honour of the sacred order, not to countenance any notorious crimes in its members, but openly show our disapprobation of that which is evil?

The other error of which we may be guilty, is that of aggravating the faults, and blackening the characters of the ministers of the gospel, and casting contempt on the sacred office itself, when those invested with it act unworthily of their holy function.—Both these extremes are very culpable. However; as the ill-natured world is much more inclined to the latter, St. Paul's advice is the more carefully to be observed: "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed."*

5. Many wicked men affect an appearance of virtue

* 2 Cor. vi. 3.

and religion. Judas had contrived the most unjustifiable schemes; yet he would conceal his perfidy under a show of love, and friendship. Few persons are so abandoned, as to throw off the appearance of virtue and piety; or choose to appear in the eyes of the world so bad as they actually are. Hence they endeavour to palliate their vices with specious names: avarice, for instance, is styled frugality; and sensuality is deemed the innocent indulgence of our natural appetites.

II.

As to the companions and attendants of Judas, they may be divided into three classes.

1. The band or multitude. By these are understood the Roman soldiers in garrison near the temple; who particularly on the great festivals, when there was a vast concourse of people at Jerusalem, were to guard the vicinity of the temple, lest any insurrection or tumult should happen in that quarter. Of this Roman garrison, some officers were sent with a party of soldiers to apprehend Jesus.

2. The officers of the Sanhedrim, which consisted of the chief-priests and pharisees. These probably comprised not only the ordinary officers of justice, whose business was to apprehend and bring criminals before the court, but also the domestics and attendants of the members of the Sanhedrim.

3. There appear likewise to have been some particular persons deputed by the high-priests, scribes, and elders; to whom Christ particularly addressed himself in the garden. The whole constituted a mixed multitude, of different ranks and professions,

headed by Judas, as their guide. Hence we may learn,

1. That when Christ and his interest are to be withstood, the most opposite descriptions of men readily combine for the purpose. In this multitude was united a strange medley of Jews and pagans; for the temple guard, which consisted of Roman soldiers, was generally obnoxious to the Jews. The spirit of persecution shows itself indiscriminately in all ranks and degrees.

2. A suppression of the remonstrances of conscience is usually followed by acts of scandalous transgression. The high-priests and pharisees had hitherto been restrained by fear from apprehending Jesus. They were, on the one hand, convinced of the divine power exhibited in his miracles, as Nicodemus, in the name of them all, acknowledges;* on the other hand, they saw the veneration of the people towards him, and feared that any violence offered to him might be attended with dangerous consequences.† But a few hours before, they had determined not to apprehend him on the feast-day, lest there should be an uproar of the people: but so fair an opportunity was now presented by Judas of getting Jesus into their hands, that their fears were forgotten, and the prudent suggestions of their consciences were suppressed; they became hardened, and lost to all sense of shame. An inward consciousness of right and wrong is the check by which the bulk of mankind are usually restrained: when this is thrown aside, and they will no longer listen to the intimations of conscience, they trample on all laws human and divine,

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* John, iii. 2. † Matthew, xxvi. 4.

and lose all sense of shame. Let this excite in us a dread of the beginnings of sin, and make us seriously attentive to the admonitions of our consciences.

3. It is very common, but, at the same time, highly absurd, to be influenced to commit sin by the example of persons high in rank, character, or reputation. Any slight pretence for lulling to rest the conscience, is too eagerly embraced. The multitude, no doubt, concluded, that as one of Christ's own disciples and constant hearers was the leader in this conspiracy, Jesus of Nazareth must have been a pestilent and seditious fellow. Others would reason thus: "The high-priests, elders, and pharisees, who have deputed their officers, are men of learning and integrity." Thus the majority would satisfy their scruples on engaging in this execrable service. Alas! how frequently does Christ still suffer in a similar manner in his members, when the great, the learned, and the noble, oppose religion, and persecute the servants of God!

III.

For the sake of caution, the multitude were furnished with torches, and lamps or lanterns. The passover of the Jews usually happened at the full moon, so that though it was night, it probably was not dark; yet they brought with them lanterns and torches in order the better to discover our Lord, in case he should conceal himself.

They had likewise offensive weapons; swords and staves. The former were, for the most part, in the hands of the Roman soldiers; the latter belonged to the officers of the priests and pharisees. It should

seem they were under some apprehension, lest Christ and his disciples or adherents, should make resistance; and therefore they came prepared, if necessary, to carry off their prisoner by force. By coming in the night amidst a blaze of torches, they would also represent Christ as one of those miscreants who usually lurk in the dark: and by their swords and staves they would intimate that he and his followers were a company of robbers and murderers, and likely to make an obstinate defence. Hence we may learn,

1. That craft and violence are the usual arms, which satan and his instruments make use of against Christ and his people. Satan is represented to us both as a serpent, and as a roaring lion, lying in wait both to deceive and to devour. Happy is he who is armed against him, on the right, and on the left, with the whole armour of God, so as neither to be beguiled by his subtilty, nor terrified by his rage.

2. The people of Christ are still reproached, as avoiding the light, and carrying on clandestine practices, by those who are themselves children of the night and of darkness. The men of the world often boast of their good conscience, and of having nothing to fear. Yet many of these pretended children of the day, will be obliged hereafter to 'conceal themselves in the dens and caves of the rocks, and to say to the mountains fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! whatever sins we have committed in darkness, thou hast expiated; and as we have offended the justice of Heaven not only with

the powers and faculties of our souls, but also with the members of our bodies, so thou hast been pleased to make satisfaction, not only by the anguish of thy spotless soul, but by permitting thy sacred body to be assaulted. Grant, for the sake of thy love, that by these thy sufferings, we may attain the eternal salvation of our souls. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

THE TREACHEROUS BEHAVIOUR OF JUDAS.

"*As soon as Judas was come, he went forthwith to Jesus,*
"*and said, Hail master, master! and kissed him. And*
"*Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?*
"*Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*"

THESE words describe,
First, The hypocritical salutation of Judas.
Secondly, Our Lord's answer.

I.

We observe, The betrayer's coming. "As soon as Judas came, he forthwith went to Jesus."

Judas appears to have preceded the armed multitude at some distance, in order to look out for his master, that he might deliver him up. Accordingly, when he was come to the place where our Saviour was, "he went straightway to him."

2. His speech. As soon as he came up to Jesus, he said, "Hail Rabbi," or "Master." This was the

usual title which scholars gave to their teachers, and in conformity to the custom of those times, Christ accepted of this appellation from his disciples. The Jewish doctors held this title in such high esteem, that they sometimes even excommunicated those who refused it to them. Their vanity in affecting this title our blessed Lord reproaches them with;* but he might, with the greatest justice and propriety, allow himself to be so styled by his disciples; being that supreme teacher, whom even Moses had foretold.† By the repetition of this title, master! master! the hypocritical Judas would intimate the joy and love, with which his heart overflowed. He accosts Christ with this salutation, when he was in the very act of betraying him.

3. The traitor's outward behaviour. "He kissed him." In the writings of the Jews we have instances of scholars expressing their reverence and esteem to their teachers, by this form of salutation, which accordingly Judas observes to his master. We may observe,

1. Sin allowed of and indulged, urges the man forward like an impetuous stream. Judas having admitted treachery into his heart, had no longer any power over himself. Satan allowed him no time for recollection: "forthwith he came to Jesus." He was like one, who having slipped on the edge of a declivity, is unable to stop his course, but falls to the bottom. Surely we ought to watch the first beginnings of sinful propensities, and be cautious not to acquiesce in them.

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* Matt. xxiii. 7. † Deut. xviii. 15.

2. The children of this world, in the activity which they display in their pursuits, often put to shame the children of light; the latter seldom showing so much zeal for good, as the former for evil. We see how readily and undauntedly Judas came up to Jesus, to abuse him by his insidious salutation: but how few are sincerely zealous and ardent to run into the open arms of the Saviour. He graciously invites sinners, saying, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden;"* yet how few comply with this friendly invitation! He may repeat the lamentation which he once made over ungrateful Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not?"† Certainly it must reflect great disgrace on us, that Judas should show more ardour and readiness in betraying his Lord, and delivering him up to his enemies, than we do in receiving him. When he says—"My son give me thine heart"—how slow are we in offering it! How often, and how long, is he obliged to intreat for it! This promptitude of Judas should reprove us, and excite our minds to an immediate and willing obedience. Why should we hesitate? If we knew that the avenger of blood were behind us, we certainly should not stand gazing around, but should make haste, and stretch every nerve to reach the city of refuge, and save our souls alive.

3. To address Christ with Lord! Lord! and not to do the will of his heavenly Father,‡ is a deceit exactly resembling the perfidy of Judas. He cried, Rabbi! Rabbi! and yet had the worst designs in his heart against his master. Thus thousands of outward pro-

* Matt. xi. 28. † Matt. xxiii. 37. ‡ Matt. vii. 21.

fessors say, Lord! Lord! who do not obey his precepts, but follow their depraved appetites, and are the slaves of sin and satan. What is this but treading in the footsteps of Judas, who had the name Rabbi, on his tongue; yet was at the same time the treacherous friend, the betrayer of Christ?

4. For the falsehood and deceit committed by the first Adam at his fall, and daily repeated by his posterity, the second Adam was to atone. The false compliments and pretended marks of respect paid to Christ in the garden, could not but give him pain; his eyes being so pure, that they cannot behold iniquity. Even amongst mankind the more sincere any person is, the more uneasiness does it give him to find others behaving deceitfully; especially those to whom he has shown tenderness, and done kind offices. Hence we may conceive, how such dissimulation and treachery must have grieved our blessed Saviour's heart.—The universal treachery of the human heart is exemplified in the kiss of Judas.—Christ has thus expiated the various species of dissimulation and hypocrisy which are too often practised by men, with the design of imposing on God, or on each other. These in the sight of God, are no trivial sins; though by the world accounted lawful and prudent. If on self-examination we should find ourselves infected with this sin, let us open our hearts to our blessed Lord, who is true and faithful, and in whose mouth was no guile; and let us pray to him that he would inspire us with an abhorrence of all treachery and dissimulation.

II.

We come next to Christ's mild answer to the traitor. He calls him by the endearing title of 'friend;' thus reminding him of the former friendship and confidence in which they had lived,* and of the duty and affection which was therefore due from him; and he accosts him by his name 'Judas!' probably to impress on his mind the signification of that name, according to which he was to confess his master, and not to betray him. He adds,

1. "Wherefore art thou come?" As if he had said, 'You would not have it to be publicly known, for what end you are come here; you wish to conceal your falsehood under the show of respect and friendship: but I know your design, and the treachery of your heart.' Our Lord, even in his deepest humiliation, shows that he is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

2. "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" Here he gives the action its proper name, and plucks off the mask from the dissembling traitor. 'Thou betrayest that Son of man whom thou thyself hast preached to the world, and from whom thou hast received so many favours; and, what is still worse, thou dost it under a token of peace and friendship.' This gentle address appears calculated for softening the heart of Judas, and recalling it to a sense of duty. But all was in vain! He was totally hardened. He had already heard so many pathetic discourses from his master, without paying any regard to them, that satan had now obtained over him an absolute power.

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* Psalms, xli. 9.

The mildness and indulgence shown by the Lord Jesus towards the greatest of sinners, should reprove our hardness of heart. Christ calls Judas his friend, who had acted the part of an enemy towards him. Why does he not denounce the dreadful catastrophe that was about to befall the betrayer of the Son of man? Had the best and meekest of us been in our Saviour's place, should we have shown such unparalleled gentleness? Let not our eye, then, be evil, because the Lord is good.—When Satan would inspire a repenting sinner with terrifying ideas of the divine justice, his contrite heart may derive comfort from this reflection—"Did my Saviour speak with lenity to a false friend? He will by no means sternly reject me, whose intentions are sincere."—The gentleness of our blessed Lord ought also to soften our impetuosity of temper, and teach us to preserve patience towards the worst of men; and this duty is particularly incumbent on the ministers of Christ.*—We should beware of that imprudent vehemence in reproving the sins of others, which tends to produce irritation rather than any beneficial effect; and by which we often imbitter the heart of him, who might have been reconciled by the language of brotherly love.

PRAYER.

O most mild and forgiving Jesus! who didst show kindness to thy greatest enemy; let me also who have greatly offended thee, partake of thy tender mercies. Give me grace to love mine enemies, and to bear the greatest injuries with patience and gentleness, after thy great example. Amen.

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* 2 Tim. ii. 24.

CHAPTER III.

CHRIST'S FIRST DISCOURSE WITH HIS ENEMIES.

"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come "upon him, went forth, and said unto them, whom seek "ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus "saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, who be- "trayed him, stood with them. As soon as Jesus had "said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell "to the ground."

THESE words exhibit to us the first discourse of Christ with his enemies; and it is related by St. John only, who is particularly attentive to point out every display of Christ's divinity. We observe,

First, The devotedness of Jesus to this work.

Secondly, His discourse with his enemies.

Thirdly, Its wonderful effect.

I.

"Jesus knowing all things that should come upon him." Our blessed Lord might see the blaze of the torches at a distance, and hear the confused noise of the multitude approaching. But had they come in the dark, and with the greatest silence, his omniscience would have penetrated into their hidden devices. He not only knew, that the enemy was at hand; but likewise "he knew all things that should come upon him:" all the inhuman insults, and affronts, and savage barbarity, which would attend this armed multitude.

The readiness of our blessed Lord to suffer is expressed in these words, " He went forth :" indicating his willingness to meet his enemies, and surrender himself into their power. By avoiding death hitherto, his design was to teach us, that we are not to tempt God, by wilfully running into danger. But now his hour being come, by voluntarily presenting himself, he teaches us that when we know the will of God, we are to acquiesce in it.

Christ made use of his omniscience, the more readily to meet his sufferings ; being well assured, that nothing would befall him, but what was determined in the secret counsels of God concerning the Messiah. His willing submission to meet a painful and ignominious death, was to atone for our presumptuous fall. Our first parents were not ignorant, that in the forbidden tree they should eat death. They had been told, " on the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Notwithstanding this, they followed their own imagination, and sinned against knowledge. Even now, though we know what will be the consequence of sin ; though the Scripture clearly and expressly says, " He that believeth not shall be damned—if ye live according to the flesh, ye shall die—the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, hatred, murder, &c. of which I tell you before, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" —yet we dare to commit these heinous sins, and look upon the threatnings of God's word as empty sounds. To atone for such presumptuous sins, the Son of God freely gave himself up to suffer.

Christ's willingness to undergo his sufferings is to be considered as enhancing the merit of his sacrifice. The victims in the sacrifices of the Old Testament were

dragged to the altar with cords; but Christ presented himself knowingly and voluntarily. Many have willingly encountered dangers the extent of which they did not foresee; when perhaps had they fully known beforehand, what calamity and torture was awaiting them, they would have been staggered. But in this appears the superiority of Christ: he did not enter on his sufferings blindly, but enlightened by his divine omniscience. How meritorious a power lies in this circumstance of our Lord's sufferings, we learn from St. Paul;* who assures us that by this willingness of Christ to accomplish the good pleasure of the Father in our redemption, we are reconciled and sanctified; this being the sweet smelling savour, which, in the sacrifice of Christ, was so acceptable to his heavenly father.† Thus too, he has atoned for all the murmuring and reluctance, with which our impatient nature submits to the sufferings which God has appointed for us; and at the same time, he has given us a shining example for imitation.

II.

We come now to consider,

1. The question put by our Lord to the multitude, "Whom seek ye?" These words indicate resolution and intrepidity. Satan had just before discharged his fiery darts at our blessed Lord; and he had been filled with terror and anguish. But now this agony is subsided, and he displays serenity and resignation. His enemies no sooner appear, than he boldly asks them, "Whom seek ye?" Not that he was ignorant whom

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* Heb. x. 9. † Ephes. v. 2.

they sought, "Jesus knew all things that were to come upon him;" but he wished to have the opportunity of making himself known to the multitude.

2. They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." This name is frequently given to our Saviour by way of contempt; as he had been educated by obscure parents at Nazareth, a mean town in Galilee, and had there spent most of his life. The despicable opinion which the Jews entertained of this place appears from the question put by Nathaniel, "Can there any good thing come from Nazareth?"* Nay, Christ himself was little respected there, for he owns that "a prophet is not without honour, but in his own country."† Therefore these words, 'Jesus of Nazareth,' were undoubtedly spoken by way of contempt, and showed the pride and malice of the multitude; as the modern Jews in their writings contemptuously style our blessed Saviour *The Nazarene.*

3. We have the declaration of Christ, 'I am he.' "I am that Jesus of Nazareth whom ye seek." This is a fresh proof of his cheerful readiness to meet his sufferings.

When the first Adam became obnoxious to the divine justice, he fled, and hid himself; and God called, "Adam, where art thou?" But the second Adam, when he was to be delivered into the hands of the enemy, called out, "Here am I." We may observe,

1. Christ was the principal mark at which all the assaults of Satan were levelled. He is the King on mount Sion, against whom the "Jews take counsel, and the heathen rage."‡ He is the mark aimed at

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* John, i. 46. † Mark, vi. 1. ‡ Psalms, ii. 1.

in all the persecutions which the world raises against goodness. They may pretend quite different motives, and charge the servants of God with disaffection to government in church and state, with enthusiasm, or hypocrisy; but these are the inventions of their own malice and rancour against Christ. Would they frankly own whom it is they seek in all their artful attempts, it would plainly appear that it is Jesus of Nazareth. It should be therefore no cause of wonder to us, that when we enlist under the banner, and amongst the followers of Jesus Christ, we become members of a sect which is every where spoken against.* While a man conforms to the world, and follows its pomps and vanities, and dissipations, he will be courted and esteemed by all who resemble him in dissoluteness of manners, and he may avoid the displeasure of the rest of the world. But whenever the pure temper of Christ displays itself in his conduct, he will become the mark of obloquy and ill will. The world cannot endure those virtues which bear the distinguishing features of the Lord Jesus.

2. When a persecuting spirit is excited against the saints, calumny and ridicule generally accompany it. In the instance before us they are united. As the impious hands of Christ's enemies brought weapons to assault, and cords to bind him; so their envenomed tongues loaded him with the contemptuous name of a Nazarene. Thus St. Paul, in the history of his sufferings, is called 'a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes.'† Others have been treated no better; for the world is continually branding with new names of contempt those who are actuated by the

* Acts, xxviii. 22. † Acts, xxiv. 5.

religion of Christ. But who would lay to heart such empty sounds? What detriment was it to Christ in his sufferings to be called a Nazarene! God hath now given him a name, 'at which every knee must bow.'* He that cannot bear an opprobrious name for the sake of Christ, is not worthy of him.

III.

The evangelist, before he relates the wonderful effects of our Lord's words, adds, "And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them." From these words we may conclude, that he had now boldly placed himself at the head of the multitude, without feeling any remorse; for though he had been better instructed than the rest, his heart was grown obdurate by long opposition to the motions of grace. It ought to impress us with fear, when we behold one who had been in the school of Christ, and had heard the words of eternal life from his own mouth, arrived at such an astonishing pitch of wickedness. Sad experience teaches us, that when those who are daily conversant with the word of God relax in their morals, they become more abandoned, and run greater lengths than other sinners.

But to proceed to the effect of Christ's words. "As soon as Jesus had said to them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground." Such is the force of a single word of the Lord Jesus, that like a flash of lightning, it strikes to the ground a body of armed soldiers. Christ in this instance displays

1. His omnipotence. By the simple declaration, "I am he," he strikes to the ground a tumultuous

* Phil. ii. 9.

crowd. This display of the divine power should convince us of the high dignity of the suffering person, and that he is qualified to be the supreme Judge of quick and dead. For if these words "I am he," spoken with a mild accent, had such an astonishing force, what a dreadful thunder-bolt, in the ear of the trembling sinner, will that fatal sentence be—"Depart from me, ye cursed!" If his words had such effect when he was to be judged, what amazing power will he display when he cometh to judge the world!

Our Saviour here also manifests

2. His willingness to suffer. For from this proof of his omnipotence it is evident, that he could easily have repulsed his enemies; but he only gives them a specimen of his Almighty Power, and instead of doing them any farther hurt, permits them to rise—"For the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."* We observe,

1. That even extraordinary events have not always power to move the hearts of men. Here a striking miracle was wrought; but what effect did it produce? Judas and his desperate band were not deterred from their purposes: they rose up probably more incensed than ever; nor were the other disciples strengthened against the offence of the cross, by witnessing this extraordinary event.

2. The same words of the Lord Jesus can inspire his servants with joy, and strike terror into the wicked. These few words "It is I," in a moment freed the hearts of the disciples from fear on another occasion;† and here, words of the same import‡ fill the hearts of his enemies with consternation.

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* Luke, ix. 56. † Matt. xiv. 27. Luke, xxiv. 39.

‡ The original words are the same in both places.

3. The weakness of man is never so conspicuous as when it opposes the will of God. Of what service to this great multitude is the apparatus of staves, swords, and torches, when they are employed against the power of Christ? Yet men are vain enough to boast of their strength. "All the nations, before God, are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing." * This awful consideration should move the potentates of the earth to cease from striving against God, and raging against Christ and his members, lest they be thunder-struck with these words, as St. Paul was; "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."† The gracious promise which God has given to his church remains fixed and unchangeable—"No weapon formed against thee shall prosper." ‡ Blessed is he, who has such an Almighty Being for his Lord, his Patron, and Protector! "Who is he that will harm him, if he be a follower of that which is good?" § The prince of this world, how malicious soever he may be, is already judged, and cannot hurt or annoy us without the divine permission.

PRAYER.

Almighty Saviour, before whom all the wicked are scattered as chaff before the wind, may our hearts be so thoroughly convinced of thy transcendent power and greatness, that we may willingly fall down at thy feet, and worship thee. Thou rulest amongst thine enemies; rule also in our hearts: and may that carnal mind, which is enmity against thee, be made thy footstool. Grant that thy sacred word may not be unto us a savour of death unto death, but a savour of life unto life, for the sake of thine infinite love! Amen.

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* Isaiah, xl. 17. † Acts, ix. 5. ‡ Isaiah, liv. 17. § 1 Peter, iii. 13.

CHAPTER IV.

A CONTINUATION OF CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH HIS ENEMIES.

"*Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they "said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told "you that I am he: If therefore ye seek me, let these "go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled, which "he spake; of those whom thou hast given me, have I "lost none.*"

THE Evangelist here proceeds to relate a repetition of our Lord's question. "Then asked he them again, whom seek ye?" In this narrative it is tacitly implied, that the Lord Jesus had permitted his enemies to rise, after his word had laid them prostrate on the ground. Having a little recovered from their consternation, our Lord observed that they did not perceive, or durst not address him; he therefore again audibly repeats the former question—"Whom seek ye?" "They said, Jesus of Nazareth." Thus after feeling the wonderful power of Christ, they persisted in their former execrable design, and were resolved to apprehend Jesus. Hence arise the following observations.

1. On escaping any imminent danger, we ought to ask our consciences, what future course of life we intend to lead? That very word, which had laid the enemies of our Lord on the ground, might have precipitated them into hell. Did the earth once open, and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with

their adherents, for raising a sedition against Moses, who was only a servant of God? Much more might it now have opened wide its mouth, and swallowed these rebels, who were leagued together in a conspiracy against the Son of God himself! How often are we saved from evident peril, or recovered from some dangerous disease, by the indulgent care of Divine Providence! Such a happy opportunity every one of us should lay hold of, and put these questions to himself: "What is thy present pursuit? How wilt thou now dispose of thyself? If God had snatched thee away in the midst of thy sins, thou wouldest now have been in the dark and dismal prison of a wretched eternity. But as thou art still in the land of the living, how wilt thou employ the precious remainder of thy time? What thanks wilt thou render to thy gracious Creator and Preserver, for his forbearance and long-suffering?" Such an enquiry would probably have a happy influence on our lives.

2. It is dangerous to persevere in wicked designs, in spite of repeated admonitions. The sin of these men was greatly aggravated, because they persisted after so evident and sensible a conviction of the Divinity of Christ. But, alas! this conduct is daily repeated. How often are we warned, when we have formed a design of committing some great sin! How often does conscience suggest to the mind—What art thou about? What advantage dost thou seek in sinning? What will be the end?—Yet do we repeatedly renew our impious designs, though we have been once and again prevented, and have even suffered in the attempt. This the Son of God here atones for, in permitting himself to be a second time assaulted by his enemies, though they had already felt the effects of his power.—

For in the sufferings of Christ we always observe the justice of divine retaliation. In the same manner as we sin, is our Surety punished to make expiation. Every circumstance of our sins superinduces a new circumstance in his sufferings. What Christian will therefore knowingly commit any sin, the expiation of which cost the Son of God so much pain and ignominy!

St. John proceeds to relate our Lord's voluntary surrender of himself. "I have told you that I am he." Here he repeats his former confession, and offers himself to the sufferings appointed for him. He immediately declares the truth, and shows himself that immaculate Lamb, in whose mouth was no deceit. This frank confession in such a terrifying exigency, when bonds and stripes, mockings and buffetings awaited him, was to atone for our frequent untruths and evasions in trying circumstances. We may remark,

That Christ willingly makes himself known to those, who seek him from their hearts. Does our blessed Saviour permit himself to be found by those who search for him to put him to death? How much more readily will he say to those, who implore his blessings, and seek him in faith, "Here I am." Does he discover himself to those who hate him without a cause? With what satisfaction and complacency will he fulfil that gracious promise to a faithful soul, "To him who loveth me will I manifest myself!"

Lastly; Christ procures a dismission for his disciples. This is to be considered, first, as a proof of his Omnipotence. "If ye seek me, let these go their way." Certainly these words greatly display the Majesty of Christ. This is no request, (for that would have been

little attended to by the raging multitude,) but a command. They are the words of one who could give law to his enemies. Before he yields his own hands to the cords, he, by his powerful word, binds the hands of the armed multitude, so that they cannot lay hold on his disciples; whom they certainly would not have spared, had they been permitted to follow the impulse of their malice. This was the powerful passport, which he procured for his disciples; and was not less a miracle than the effect produced at the creation, when he fixed the limits of the ocean, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther; here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

But this safe conduct is also to be looked upon as an accomplishment of his preceding prayer; which the evangelist intimates, by adding, "that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, of those whom thou hast given me, have I lost none."* These words of St. John allude to the prayer of Christ, a few hours before, for the preservation of his disciples. Though our Saviour in that pathetic prayer, unquestionably had in view something much higher than their temporal safety, yet this also was included in it. Had the disciples at this time unhappily fallen into the enemy's hand, they would not only have died a temporal death, but perhaps a spiritual and eternal one; as in some measure may be inferred from the example of Peter, who, in his distress, basely denied his master. We remark here,

1. That Christ, by his surrender of himself, procured our acquittal at the divine tribunal. This is implied

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* John, xvii. 12.

in those words of love and tenderness; "If ye seek me, let these go their way." For though they immediately relate to his disciples, yet in this expression is also comprehended all his faithful confessors, who, through his divine appointment, were to believe on him.* That they may go free, he gives himself up in their stead. This was the end of his sufferings. Hence the prophet Isaiah says, "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." He exposes himself as a mark to the arrows of God's wrath, that we may be safe behind the impenetrable shield of his merit. He permits the curse of the law to fall on himself, that we may inherit the blessing. He stands in our stead, and we in his. He was made a sin-offering for us, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

2. The power or number of our enemies can never hurt us, unless it be by God's permission. We are often withheld from doing our duty by the fear of drawing on ourselves the enmity of relations, or the displeasure of patrons and benefactors; but why should we be afraid of men? Were multitudes to rise up against us, if Christ does but pronounce this sentence of our deliverance, 'let these go,'—we shall be safe from their attempts. Why do we not much more fear him, who can destroy both body and soul in hell; him who can say, "bind this man hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness?" Should the gates of hell pour forth legions of evil spirits against us, they cannot hurt a hair of our heads, if Christ be our protector, and interpose on our behalf, saying, "touch not mine anointed."

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* John, xvii. 20.

3. Christ's prayer for his faithful servants is graciously heard and accepted by his Heavenly Father. It was but a few hours before that the Lord Jesus had put up a petition for his disciples; and behold, it is already answered: for they were the words of him that could say with confidence, "Father, I know that thou hearest me always."* Now Christ had not only prayed for his disciples and apostles, but expressly "for those, who through their word should believe on him." We also were in his heart; and that faithful High Priest then bore on his breast the names of all his spiritual Israel. Was he then so speedily heard in this prayer for his apostles, and shall not his prayer for the whole company of believers be granted? The former is a sure pledge of the latter. Therefore, as Luther says, "We may justly write this comfortable text in letters of gold, as it relates to us all. For it is our glory and consolation, our treasure and pearl; so that for us Gentiles, the whole Scriptures do not afford a more comfortable saying than this."

4. Our merciful High Priest so orders our temporal circumstances, that they may not hurt or endanger our souls. Of this we have here a plain proof; which should excite in us a firm assurance, that Christ is not unmindful of our temporal concerns. How inconsiderate are we, to place all our confidence in men; and to make no account of this Almighty Friend, who has so affectionate, so tender a concern, both for our temporal and eternal welfare!

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* John, xi. 42.

PRAYER.

O faithful and merciful Saviour! Thou who lookest on every soul which the Father hath given thee, as a precious jewel, and makest it thy concern to secure and return it to him unhurt at the last day; let this inspire us with holy confidence, and exceeding joy, knowing that no one can snatch us out of thine Almighty hand; and that thy prayer will be fulfilled in us, if we do but continue in thy ways. Keep us then as the apple of thine eye, that none of us may be lost; but that one day, we may be where thou art, and behold thy glory. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of thy meritorious intercession! Amen.

CHAPTER V.

CHRIST IS APPREHENDED, AND PETER DEFENDS HIM.

"Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.
"When they, who where with him, saw what would follow,
"they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?
"And behold, one of them who were with Jesus, namely,
"Simon Peter, having a sword, stretched out his hand, and
"drew it, and smote a servant of the high-priest, and cut
"off his right ear: the servant's name was Malchus."

HERE is described,
First, The apprehension of Christ.
Secondly, An attempt to defend him.

I.

1. It is said, "Then came they;" meaning the soldiers and officers who, at the desire of the chief priests, and

elders, had been sent thither. Some of them, possibly, from a blind zeal, were glad to be employed in this business; especially the officers of the high-priests and pharisees, who, from hearing continual invectives against Jesus of Nazareth, had doubtless, imbibed the strongest prejudices against his person. Others bore a part in this tragedy only from an implicit obedience to the command of their superiors; and of such it may be said, as of Absalom's companions, "They went in their simplicity." * It is here farther related that

2. "They laid hands on Jesus, and took him." From these words it is easy to infer with what rude violence they collected around our blessed Lord, and how barbarously they hurried him away; especially, as they had been disappointed before, and notwithstanding their swords and spears, had been by a single sentence thrown prostrate on the ground. This would sharpen their malice and desire of revenge. The psalmist compares the attack of the enemies of Messiah, to the being surrounded by bees.† Observe here,

1. It is a melancholy sign of obduracy, to sin immediately after having felt God's chastening hand. It was just so with Pharaoh; he scarce began to breathe after a grievous plague from the Lord, when his stubbornness returned: and so it is with the generality of mankind. When they feel the hand of God heavy upon them, and consuming their strength by lingering disease, they become submissive; but as they resume their strength and spirits, their obstinacy and depravity return. There is no state more dangerous than that of such incorrigible offenders.

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* 2 Sam. xv. 11. † Psalms, cxviii. 12.

2. It is a judgment from God on a sinner, when his wicked intentions are permitted to succeed. Evil men indeed put another construction upon it: "the wicked boasteth of obtaining his heart's desire."* The chief priests and pharisees exulted not a little on this occasion, having long waited in vain for an opportunity of laying hands on our Lord:† but by this very act they sealed the fate of their devoted nation.

3. To Christ's being bound as a prisoner, we owe our spiritual freedom. Thus should we have been bound, and dragged along by a multitude of evil spirits, as the voluntary slaves of Satan, and should have been eternally led captive at his will.‡ Our freedom could only be obtained, by our Redeemer and Surety in our stead submitting to a wretched imprisonment. O that we may rightly use this inestimable benefit purchased for us at so dear a rate; cast off the yoke of sin and Satan, and with willing and thankful hearts, serve the great restorer of our liberty during the whole course of our lives!

II.

An account is moreover given of an attempt made by the disciples to rescue their master, and prevent his being carried away by the multitude.

1. The disciples had most probably imagined that Christ would save himself by flight, and pass through the crowd, as he had done at other times.§ But when they saw him actually in the hands of his enemies, they thought it was high time to

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* Psalms, x. 3. † Luke, xx. 19.; John, x. 39.
‡ 2 Tim. ii. 26. § John, viii. 59.

rescue him, or do something in his defence. Therefore they ask, "Lord shall we smite with the sword?"— In this proceeding, there was something commendable, and something to be blamed. They were to be commended for first asking this question; probably they had not wholly forgotten their master's reiterated precepts of submission and resignation. But on the other hand, it was a rash attempt, with two swords (which were all they had) to oppose a strong party of soldiers. They might perhaps misunderstand those words of Christ, "let him that hath no sword sell his garment and buy one;"† an expression by which our Saviour had intimated, that they should come into such dangerous circumstances, as to be like persons travelling amongst robbers; that instead of having the conveniences of life, their very lives should be in jeopardy: and that they should be deprived as out-laws, of the protection of the magistrates, and should suffer every species of outrage. It may be observed,

That feelings of anger and revenge, in the time of outward sufferings, are dangerous instigations of Satan. It is true that in seasons of danger, proper means of defence are to be used: but still we are not to forget that in the Christian warfare we are called to suffer. These impulses to revenge and rash resistance our blessed Lord has atoned for; and he has also taught and strengthened us to check and overcome them.

The hour of suffering is the test, which displays the inward disposition of the heart. The disciples might, at other times, imagine that they were become like their master, mild and gentle, yet they here attempt

† Luke, xxii. 36.

to rescue him by ill-judged violence. God permits us sometimes to fall into circumstances, by which the secret dispositions of our minds are laid open to us. Do we imagine ourselves possessed of extraordinary patience and mildness? We receive some injurious treatment, and our impetuous nature immediately betrays itself. When God gives us opportunities of knowing ourselves, we should consider it as a mark of his favour. Under such circumstances we should commune with ourselves, take a general review of our hearts, and search what other mistakes are lurking there; and these we must encounter, and carefully exterminate.

2. We are to notice more particularly the rash behaviour of Simon Peter on this occasion. We may conceive, how it must have concerned our blessed Saviour, that one of his disciples should commit such a fault; the very person too, whom he had so often warned against rashness, violence, and presumption. But Peter continued the same character, and being full of zeal for his Lord and Master, he proceeded, without considering the means, to execute his good intentions.

His attack was violent and impetuous. He did not stay for his master's answer to the question; but, according to his usual warmth and precipitancy, was instantly ready. We may suppose, that he now recollected the promise he had made, and thought that something was to be risqued for the deliverance of his master. Seeing the multitude lay hands on Jesus, he resolved to act with courage; drew a sword, "smote Malchus, a servant of the high-priest, and cut off his ear." This man, possibly, showed himself remarkably forward and eager in apprehending the Lord Jesus;

and therefore Peter attacked him first. Probably his intention was to give a mortal blow; but Christ averted the rash stroke, so that it only cut off his ear. This temerity cost Peter dear, when he was afterwards recognized in the high-priest's palace, by a kinsman of this Malchus. Hence we learn,

1. That a good intention, if joined with blind zeal and rash conduct, often occasions much evil. That Peter meant well on this occasion, cannot be questioned. He probably concluded, that now was the time for giving a public proof of his love to his master. But in reality it proved otherwise; for he only increased the sufferings of Christ, injured his cause, and brought him into a suspicion of rebellious designs; as if he had taught his disciples to repel force by force, and oppose the existing government. Thus he gave a handle to the enemies of his master, to charge him with stirring up the people.

2. God frequently over-rules the faults of his servants, that the consequences may not be fatal. Here he turns aside Peter's rash blow, so that it only cuts off an ear. Novices in religion frequently commit many faults, which God, for wise purposes is pleased to permit; but he so moderates and restrains them, that his cause may not be materially injured. How gracious is the Lord, who stretches forth his arm to support us when we inadvertently fall!

3. The faults of weak Christians ought not to be charged on religion. Christ no doubt was blamed and censured for this action of his disciple. 'Here,' it would be said, 'you have a specimen of the doctrines of Jesus of Nazareth. This is one of his old disciples; where should he have learned such behaviour, but

from his master?' But who will presume to say, that the enemies of Christ argued justly on this occasion? Yet this is the way of the world; when any religious person commits a fault, Christianity is reproached with it.

PRAYER.

Eternal thanks be ascribed to thee, most faithful Saviour, for thy patience, long-suffering, and forbearance towards thy poor children May we also partake of it amidst our temerity and impatience, our proneness to anger and revenge! Cast us not from thee for our manifold infirmities; strengthen thou us by thy Holy Spirit, and make us more patient, wise, and considerate, so that we may reflect honour on thy holy religion, and make our light to shine before men. Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

CHRIST'S MILD REPROOF TO HIS DISCIPLES.

" Jesus answered, and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he " touched his ear, and healed him. Then said Jesus unto " Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath; for all they " that take the sword shall perish with the sword. The " cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it? " Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and " he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of " angels? but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, " that thus it must be?"

By these words we find, that Christ reproved his disciples, who were for repelling force by force; and this he does

First, By his action.

Secondly, By his words.

I.

The action was our Lord's kind reparation of the fault of Peter, by healing the ear which he had cut off. Jesus said, " Suffer ye thus far." Some suppose, that Christ addressed these words to his disciples, enjoining them not to oppose the accomplishment of his sufferings, but to permit the Roman soldiers to fulfil what the Father had decreed. But the expression seems rather directed to the soldiers, intimating a wish to have his hands at liberty, until he had healed the man's ear.

" And he touched his ear." It was usual with the Lord Jesus to touch those diseased persons whom he cured, and by his miraculous touch to impart his

healing virtue to them.* Thus, in this instance, by touching the ear, it is instantly restored and healed. By working this miracle he intended to show, that he by no means approved of Peter's indiscreet zeal. Hence we may draw the following inferences.

1. The children of God should behave with circumspection in all things, and be the more cautious, as many eyes are watching them, and many slanderous tongues are ready to proclaim their mistakes.—Though Christians are reproached by the world, as if they accounted themselves perfect, yet none more ingenuously acknowledge, that they offend in many things, and stand in need of a mediator to expiate their daily faults.—We should in all our actions proceed with prudence and caution, and reflect that we are surrounded by dangers. But when it happens that we transgress, let us not be utterly discouraged. As Satan is particularly on the watch for souls of a melancholy disposition; is very dexterous in magnifying the guilt of their errors, and representing them to be of an unpardonable nature; they should encourage themselves in the Lord their God; and after sincere repentance for the fault committed, lay hold on the merits of Christ by faith, and follow after a greater holiness of heart and life.

2. To do good to our enemies, is an important point in our imitation of Christ. Here with his healing hand he touches the ear of a man, who had stretched out his impious hand to seize and bind him. This bitter enemy of our Lord had well deserved to have the hand, which he had stretched out, withered, as was the hand of Jeroboam, when he signified his order

* Matthew, viii. 3.; ix. 29.

for seizing the prophet:* for certainly one greater than a prophet was here. But the meek and merciful Saviour over-looks all the outrages committed against himself, touches the wounded ear, and heals it. Should any of us have behaved with such unparalleled mildness? Alas! with what difficulty does that lesson, "Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you," find admission into the human heart! The bare abstinence from revenge, is a hard and disagreeable task to human nature; whereas God is offended every day, and yet is patient and long-suffering. Most men would consider it unreasonable (especially whilst the sense and pain of the injury is still recent) to be applied to for their assistance in behalf of a person who has injured them. The pure doctrines and bright example of our divine teacher are slighted, among most of those who call themselves Christians!

II.

Christ having repaired the fault committed by his sanguine disciple, reproves him in words, which, though particularly addressed to Peter, were spoken within hearing of the other disciples. In this reproof is contained,

First, a command: "Put up thy sword in its sheath." Our Lord thus restrains him from proceeding to further violence; and subjoins the motives which should induce Peter to comply: viz.

1. The danger attending it. "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." To take the sword, in an illegal manner, is to assume the power of self-revenge. God has committed the sword to the

* 1 Kings, xiii. 4.

civil magistrate;* and whoever intrudes on his office, takes the sword out of his hand, so that of such an one, it is here said, "he shall perish by the sword;" that is, the civil power must use the sword against him. How easily might Peter have taken away the life of the high-priest's servant, and consequently have fallen into the hands of the civil power, and been punished as an assassin.

2. Our blessed Lord also represents to him, that this proceeding is unbecoming and sinful, as it tended to obstruct him in his obedience to his Father, and in the accomplishment of his great design, the redemption of mankind. "The cup which my Father has given me, shall not I drink it?" He calls his sufferings a cup; and considers them as sent by his Father; who, according to his predetermined counsel, had appointed them.† Our Lord therefore asks, 'Shall I not submit? Shall I withdraw myself from them, after having in the counsel of the Father offered myself for this purpose? Blush, Peter, that thou wouldest, by violence, make me break my promise.'

3. Christ shows him, that this resistance is unnecessary: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" 'I do not stand in need of your defence; were I desirous of it, I might have much more powerful assistance. It is but speaking the word, and the Father would send me, instead of twelve apostles, twelve legions of angels; a host, which in an instant could crush all the power of my enemies.'

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* Rom. xiii. 4. † Acts, ii. 23.

4. He represents to Peter, that it is impossible to accomplish his design: "Thus it must be." God has determined it, and foretold it in the holy scriptures. He cannot act contrary to his word, nor forfeit his veracity. Besides, the human race can be redeemed in no other manner: to endeavour to obstruct the decree of God would be a vain and fruitless attempt. Hence let us learn the following truths.

1. The Lord Jesus forgives the sins of his servants, but at the same time he reproves the defect of their intentions.* The error committed by Peter, and the other disciples, was pardoned; but they did not go without a mild reproof. He knows our frame with all its weaknesses; and indulgently pardons the failings of his poor servants; especially when they are under difficulties and afflictions. It is a consolation to Christians, that they have a merciful High Priest, who, by the merit of his patience, atones for the errors which they commit under the pressure of afflictions.

2. Our reproofs of our neighbour should proceed from a concern for his welfare, and be mixed with mildness and gentleness. Christ might have given Peter a severe reprimand, and reproached him with the injury he did to his master's cause: but our blessed Lord contents himself with forbidding him to proceed in his indiscretion. This disapprobation does not carry him beyond the bounds of meekness; neither does he reproach Peter with having thus aggravated his sufferings. By this instance we may learn how to endure the sufferings occasioned by the indiscretion of

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* Psalms, xcix. 8.

our acquaintance, and of those with whom we are connected.

3. When our Saviour says, "Shall I not drink the cup which my Father hath given me?" he directs Peter's thoughts from human agency, to the counsels of God, who had appointed his sufferings. If we consider by whom afflictions are sent, and that our cup is mixed by the healing hand of our heavenly Father, this reflection will sweeten the bitter potion.

4. In the greatest sufferings, it is a comfort to the servants of God to know, that they have a Saviour to whom all the angels of God are ministering spirits. Here our blessed Lord declines the services of angels, because the decisive hour of his sufferings was now come. He has however acquired for us their protection. He now is in an exalted state, in which angels, principalities, and powers, are subject to him, and reverentially adore the human nature united with the Godhead. When a Christian is in danger or affliction, he views his Saviour surrounded by unnumbered legions of angels; and doubts not that he who has these glorious messengers at his command, will vouchsafe to support him in his distress. "For the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" * and these ministering spirits are "sent forth, to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation." †

PRAYER.

Blessed Saviour! who knowest our frame, and rememberest that we are dust; adored be thy name for thy long-suffering and tender mercy towards thy of-

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* Psalms, xxxiv. 7. † Heb. i. 14.

fending servants. Thanks be to thee, who wouldest not permit the course of thy sufferings to be obstructed, lest at the same time our redemption should be prevented; and who didst readily drink of the cup of affliction, that we might not eternally drink the vials of God's wrath and indignation. May we patiently submit to all sufferings for thy sake, and may thy holy angels assist and support us! Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BINDING OF CHRIST, AND HIS REMONSTRANCE TO HIS ENEMIES.

"*Then the band, and the captain, and the officers of the "Jews, took Jesus, and bound him. In the same hour, "Jesus said to the chief priests, and captains of the "temple, and the elders, who were come to him, Are ye "come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves "to take me? I was daily with you teaching in the "temple, and ye took me not: But this is your hour, "and the power of darkness. And all this was done, "that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.*"

We have here described,
First, The binding of Christ.
Secondly, His remonstrance.

I.

The instruments of this cruelty, were the Roman soldiers, with their captain; and the officers of the

Jewish Sanhedrim, and other domestics of the scribes and pharisees.

"They bound Jesus:" the savage ferocity with which this was done, may be conjectured from the prophecy; "Many bulls have compassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round: they gaped upon me with their mouths as a ravening and a roaring lion."* "They thrust sore at me that I might fall." This binding must have been the more painful, our blessed Saviour having, but a little before, been weakened by his violent agony and bloody sweat, when he lay with his face on the ground, when "the sorrows of hell compassed him about, and the snares of death prevented him."† We shall here make the following observations.

1. The greater love any one has for Christ, the more attentive will he be in considering the particular circumstances of his sufferings. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who loved Jesus with a most ardent affection, is the only evangelist who takes notice of the binding of our Saviour. An affectionate soul, not only considers the sufferings of Christ in general, but dwells on every circumstance of his passion.

2. The true followers of Christ, when they experience treatment resembling that which he here received, are meek and patient, not repelling force by force, not returning railing for railing; but according to the pattern set by their Lord and Master, resigning themselves to sufferings: yet the world is ready to abuse their patience and submission. "Let us, say they, examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness, and prove his patience."‡

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* Psalms, xxii. 12. † Psalms, xviii. 5. ‡ Wisdom, ii. 19.

3. The minutest circumstances in the sufferings of Christ, receive an importance, from the dignity of the suffering person. He, who is here bound, is the "Captain of the Lord's host;"* "the Prince of the Kings of the earth."† Here those hands are fettered, which "spread out the heavens, and founded the earth;" which "loosed the bands of Orion:"‡ those hands, which never did any hurt, or rather, which are continually open to "satisfy every living thing with plenteousness;" those hands whose all-healing touch had cleansed lepers, and restored feet to the lame, and eyes to the blind. We must consider these particulars, before we can set a due value on the bonds of Christ. This is the method which the Holy Spirit observes in foretelling the sufferings and contemptuous treatment of the Messiah. He is first introduced speaking in this manner: "At my rebuke I dry up the sea: I make the rivers a wilderness: I clothe the heavens with blackness; and I make sackcloth their covering."§ Then it follows, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

4. Whoever duly considers the bonds of Christ, is excited to a voluntary obedience to his commands. The scripture says, "the love of Christ constraineth us."‖ He will esteem it an honour to serve the Lord Christ, whose service is perfect freedom; and if he be still under the dominion of enslaving appetites and passions, he will (like the woman bound by Satan) apply to Christ for freedom and relief.**

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* Joshua, v. 14. † Rev. i. 5. ‡ Job, xxxviii. 31.
§ Isaiah, l. 2. ‖ 2 Cor. v. 14. ** Luke, xiii. 11.

II.

We are now to consider the purport of our Lord's remonstrance. He first reproves the armed multitude for coming out against him with such a force, as if he were one of those murderers or robbers who were then frequent in Judea; and shows that by such a proceeding, they misrepresented him as if he intended to oppose the civil power. Our Lord reminds them, what his former behaviour had been: "I was daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye took me not." Christ, or the Messiah, had been promised as a prophet, and teacher of righteousness;* which sacred office he had well discharged. What were the doctrines which he taught, we may learn from his very enemies; "Thou teachest the way of God in truth:"† and how he inculcated his divine doctrines, we may gather from St. Matthew, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."‡

The place where he taught, was the temple. By the temple, is here understood the court of the congregation; in which there was a synagogue, where, on the sabbath days, and great festivals, the law was read and expounded by the priests and Levites; and this was the place, where our blessed Lord, when he was but twelve years of age, was found amongst the doctors. There were also several cloisters or porticoes; particularly that called Solomon's Porch, to which Jesus often repaired with his disciples.§

The time when he taught, is expressed to have been "daily." It is plain, that this is to be limited

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* Deut. xviii. 18 † Matt. xxii. 16. ‡ Matt. vii. 29.
§ John, x. 23.

to the periods when Christ visited Jerusalem, and especially to the days immediately preceding his passion; during which time, St. Luke tells us, that "he taught daily in the temple." * This circumstance Jesus adduces to his enemies as a convincing proof that he is no plunderer or plotting assassin; for such persons generally shun the public eye. He intimates, that their present proceeding was wrong; since if he had taught any erroneous tenets, or pernicious doctrines, they might before have silenced him, or have taken him in the temple, and brought him to a legal trial; instead of calling in the military power, and coming upon him in the night. We shall here make the following observations.

1. The world, though it may bind the hands of the persecuted witnesses of truth, cannot prevent their tongues from confessing the truth. Christ gives up his hands to the cords, but his tongue remains free, according to his previous resolution, "I will not refrain my lips." † Thus in the history of the martyrs we frequently find, that in the midst of their sufferings they exhorted the spectators in the most impressive manner.

2. The profanation of edifices consecrated to divine worship, should not prevent our frequenting them. The temple was at that time profaned in the most abominable manner, so that Christ himself calls it "a den of thieves:" ‡ nevertheless, our blessed Lord was daily present in the temple, and there performed his prophetic office. Some rigid religionists may absent themselves from places of worship, on account

* Luke, xix. 47. † Psalms, xl. 9. ‡ Luke, xix. 46.

of defects in the conduct or manner of their minister, or the careless behaviour of the congregation, alleging that they are more offended than edified; but the great example of the Saviour should teach persons on no account to forbear coming to hear the word of God, and to worship him in his sanctuary; on the contrary, they should seek to be edified, and show a good example to others.

3. Christians should not shun the light; but conduct themselves so, that their actions may bear the public view. Christ's teaching was public; nor did he exclude any one who was willing to hear him. He taught publicly in the temple, where every one might know and examine his doctrine. Our Lord and Master had no need to conceal himself, or carry on his designs clandestinely; neither should Christians deviate from his great example. How glorious an apology is it, when one can say with St. Paul, "I have lived in all good conscience before God to this day!" * How honourable is it to be able, with godly simplicity, to carry on our affairs openly and in the eyes of the whole world! The children of darkness can by no means bear the public eye; for "he who doeth evil hateth the light." Those alone skulk, and hide their actions, whose conduct will not bear the light; "it is a shame to speak of those things that are done of them in secret." If the secret thoughts and actions of many were to be publicly known, they would be overwhelmed with confusion. Where is the man to be found, who is always ready to declare his secret thoughts and intentions? What sinful, atheistical, wanton, or impious thoughts would then be made

* Acts, xxiii. 1.

public! Let us endeavour to be children of the light, and check every thought and inclination of which we should fear the exposure.

4. Wicked men will be charged with such sins, as they would willingly have committed, but could not through want of opportunity. The enemies of Christ had not laid hands on him in the temple, only because it had not been in their power: their hands were withheld by fear of the people. When the sinner laments that he cannot perpetrate the wickedness which he intended, God will impute it to him as if it had been actually committed. The true Christian must willingly and freely, for the honour of Christ, abstain from, and shun evil; even with every opportunity and ability for its commission.

Our Lord adds, "This is your hour." By the hour, is to be understood, the time appointed for our Saviour's sufferings. He says to his enemies, "This is your hour;" that is, the time which you have long wished for, and in which you are permitted to put your purposes in execution, and to set aside God, and the fear of him, from before your eyes! In their opinion this was a fortunate hour, in which the scheme they had been so long contriving was to be executed. But it was a very unfortunate hour for them; for it is added, "and the power of darkness:" that is, the time when God had permitted the prince of darkness to prompt them to an unparalleled crime. This hour is to be considered,

With respect to the divine decree. "And all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled:" namely, those passages in which it is foretold that Messiah should be surrounded by ravenous

dogs and roaring lions; * should be apprehended and ill-treated. It must not hence be concluded, that the Jews were under a necessity of sinning, that the scripture might be fulfilled. This inference would be incompatible with the holiness and justice of God, whose prescience foretold the wickedness of the Jews, by the mouths of the inspired writers. If the Jews had acted otherwise, the event would have been otherwise predicted: but their behaviour on this occasion showed, that the prophets had foretold the circumstances of our Lord's passion with the strictest accuracy. From this passage we deduce the following truths.

1. He who looks on the hours as his own, will be seduced to many sins. Time is not our own property, but belongs to God. Of every hour, every moment of time, we are to give account to him: for as we are but stewards of all his other gifts, so likewise are we of this; and it is of infinite value, because our eternal welfare depends upon the right use of it. With what care and caution ought we to improve our time, that no fleeting hour may pass in which we do not sow some good seed for our future harvest in a blessed eternity!

2. When men imagine themselves to be acting freely according to their own corrupt inclinations, they are generally the greatest slaves of Satan. The Jews, in the instance before us, seem to have their hands at full liberty, and without controul to lay hold of and bind our blessed Lord; but he tells them they are under the power of the prince of darkness, whom the

* Psalms, xxii.

Almighty permits to rule them at his will. "Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin." *

3. The character and doom of the wicked are faithfully set forth in the sacred scriptures. "There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked." "When the wicked spring as the grass, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever." How deplorable a consideration is it, that these threatenings are fulfilled in so many! That the punishments denounced by God against his enemies should fall on such multitudes! On the other hand, how joyful is it to see and experience the accomplishment of those precious promises, which God has graciously made to his people.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, who didst permit the hour of affliction to come upon thee, in which thine enemies stretched out their hands to bind thee; thou hast delivered us from bondage to the powers of darkness, so that they shall not triumph over our souls. Thanks be to thee for this unspeakable grace! Grant that we may live as true subjects of thy kingdom of light and peace, and serve thee in holiness and righteousness of life, for the sake of thy meritorious submission. Amen.

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* John, viii. 34.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRIST DESERTED BY HIS DISCIPLES.

"*Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And there "followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth "cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold "on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them "naked.*"

HERE it is related how the disciples deserted their Lord and Master.

Hitherto, probably, they had imagined, that the Lord would disengage himself from the hands of his enemies; that, like Samson, he would break their cords, or that he would pass through the multitude unobserved; and entertaining these flattering hopes, they might be ready to risk all for his sake. But seeing that their master yielded to his enemies, and that he was bound and hurried along like another man, their courage failed them, and all their thoughts turned on their own safety. All the disciples fled; and consequently the intrepid Peter himself, who had made such mighty protestations that he was ready to die with Jesus; John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who, but a few hours before, at the eating of the paschal lamb, had leaned on his sacred bosom; and James, who together with John his brother, had offered to drink the cup which Jesus was to drink of, and be baptized with his baptism.* Christ

* Matt. xx. 22.

had foretold this flight, saying, "All ye shall be offended because of me;"* so that it was accompanied with an offence taken at their Lord and Master. 'Alas!' said they amongst themselves, 'what mistaken men are we! We looked on Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, and the promised Messiah, who was to redeem Israel from slavery; but in all appearance, our expectations were ill-grounded, and our hopes will be frustrated. If he were the Son of God, surely his heavenly Father would not let his enemies triumph over him.' Thus were they offended at the sufferings of Christ, and by flight hastened to save themselves; and thus was Messiah deserted by his friends, as had been predicted of him.

St. Mark also mentions the flight of a certain young man.

This affrighted youth is expressly distinguished from the disciples of our Lord, and therefore it is not probable that he was one of the twelve; for the disciples had left their master; whereas, this young man, for some time followed him. He probably lived in a village near Gethsemanè, through which the blessed Jesus was hurried away; and being awakened out of sleep by the noise of the multitude, had gone out to discover the cause of the tumult, with a linen cloth cast about his body. The occasion of his flight is also mentioned.

His extraordinary appearance had excited the attention of the young men, viz. the Roman soldiers; they suspected him to be one of our Saviour's disciples, and probably apprehended he might raise a disturbance in the streets of Jerusalem, and stir up the people to

* Matt. xxvi. 31.

rescue Jesus, and on this account, they laid hold on him. The apparent design of this narrative is to show how inveterate the enemies of our Lord were, in not sparing any one whom they suspected to be a disciple; and that it was not to be imputed to the lenity of the soldiers, but to Christ's command, "Let these go their way,"—that they did not also seize the disciples, or pursue them when they fled. From the flight of our Lord's disciples and followers we learn;

1. That men are not aware of their weakness, until God permits them to fall into such circumstances as to give evident proofs of it. How often had our Lord declared to his disciples the weakness of their nature?* Peter contradicted his master repeatedly, boasted that he would bear him company to prison and to death; and with this sanguine presumption inflamed the rest of the disciples, so that they all made the same protestation. But what they would not believe, they were to experience to their sorrow. Thus also it is with us. We entertain such a high opinion of our own hearts, that we think them proof against every attack. The secret delusion that lurks in them, we are slow to believe. When God would bring us to a knowledge of ourselves, and our own inability, he permits us to fall into such circumstances as discover the inmost recesses of our hearts.

2. The disciples, in their flight, afford a proof of human inconstancy. One moment elate; the next spiritless and desponding. In the prospect of danger, they were rash and daring; when it arrived, they were faint-hearted and irresolute. Though the dis-

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* Zach. xiii. 7. Mark, xiv. 27.

ciples had an assurance from Christ himself, that their enemies should not hurt them, yet they basely fled. We have not one only, but numberless great and precious promises, that God will be with us in distress; yet in time of danger, how timorous and fluctuating are our hearts? On the first appearance of any calamity, like Jacob, we prepare for flight. It becomes us with sorrow to own, that we have but little confidence in God, or reliance on his promises, which notwithstanding, are all "yea, and Amen."

3. Christ, by being thus forsaken by his best and most intimate friends, has atoned for the unfaithfulness which we have been guilty of towards God. We have forsaken the inexhaustible source of life and happiness, our best friend, and greatest benefactor, and therefore have deserved to be eternally forsaken by him. But the blessed Jesus has interposed to expiate our ingratitude, by this desertion which he suffered.

4. When we are abandoned by all men in our distress, the remembrance of our blessed Lord's having been forsaken should powerfully support our spirits. This desertion aggraved his sufferings, but at the same time imparted to them an heroic dignity; for by this means, the honour of the victory obtained over death belongs to him only; not one of his disciples or adherents being at hand to assist or support him. As he has experienced the anguish arising from this desertion, we may rest assured he will never neglect or forsake us: and if from extreme trouble, and under severe persecutions, we unhappily forsake him, yet he is faithful, and on our return to him, will receive us, and will be our unerring guide, even unto death.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, praised be thy name for all the external sufferings which thou wert pleased to endure for our sake. Let us not forget at what an inestimable price our redemption was procured, that we may set the higher value on our immortal souls. May every painful circumstance of thy sufferings be deeply impressed upon our minds; and may thy Holy Spirit enlighten, support, and strengthen us, that we may courageously follow thee, and not be ashamed of the reproach of thy religion. To thee, the victorious captain of our salvation, who art perfected and glorified by sufferings, be ascribed unfeigned thanks and praise, for ever and ever! Amen.

3. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL COURT OF THE JEWS.

Narratives of the four Evangelists harmonised.

"AND they that had laid hold on Jesus led him "away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to "Caiaphas who was the high-priest that same year. "Now Caiaphas was he, who gave counsel to the "Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die "for the people. And they led Jesus away to Caiaphas "the high-priest, where the scribes and elders were "assembled.

"Simon Peter followed Jesus afar off, so did another "disciple, to the palace of the high-priest. That "other disciple was known unto the high-priest, and "went in with Jesus into the palace of the high-"priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then "went out that other disciple who was known to the "high-priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, "and brought in Peter. And the servants and of-"ficers stood there, who had made a fire of coals for "it was cold; and they warmed themselves: and "Peter went in, and sat amongst the servants, and "warmed himself at the fire: that he might see the "end. Then the damsel that kept the high-priest's "door beheld Peter, as he sat by the fire, and "earnestly looked upon him, and said, Thou also "wast with Jesus of Nazareth the Galilean. Art

" thou not one of this man's disciples? But he denied
" it before them all, saying, Woman, I am not, I
" know him not; neither understand I what thou
" sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the
" cock crew.

" The high-priest then asked Jesus of his disciples,
" and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake
" openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue,
" and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort,
" and in secret have I said nothing. Why asked thou
" me? Ask them who heard me, what I have said unto
" them: Behold they know what I have said.

" And when Jesus had thus spoken, one of the
" officers, who stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of
" his hand, saying, answerest thou the high-priest so?
" Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear wit-
" ness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?
" (Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas the
" high-priest.)

" And a little while after, as Peter was gone out to
" the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto
" them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus
" of Nazareth. Then one said unto him, Art thou not
" one of his disciples? But Peter again denied with an
" oath: Man, I am not; I know not the man. And
" after a while, about the space of one hour, another
" confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow
" also was with him; for he is a Galilean. Then
" they that stood by came up, and said to Peter,
" Surely, thou also art one of them; for thou art a
" Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto, and be-
" wrayeth thee. One of the servants of the high-
" priest (being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off,)

" saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?
" But Peter began to curse and to swear, and again
" denied it, and said, Man, I know not what thou
" sayest: I know not this man of whom ye speak.

" And immediately, while Peter yet spake, the cock
" crew a second time. And the Lord turned, and
" looked upon Peter: and Peter remembered the word
" of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the
" cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And
" he went out and wept bitterly.

" Now the chief priests and elders, and all the
" council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put
" him to death; but found none, yea, though many
" bare false witness against him, their testimony agreed
" not together. At the last came two false witnesses
" and said, we heard him say, I am able to (I will)
" destroy this temple of God that is made with hands,
" and within three days I will build another made
" without hands. But neither so did their witness
" agree together. Then the high-priest stood up in
" the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, answerest thou
" nothing? What is it that these witness against thee?
" But Jesus held his peace, and answered nothing.

" And straightway in the morning, as soon as it was
" day, the chief priests, the elders of the people, and
" the scribes, took counsel against Jesus to put him to
" death, and they led him into their counsel; and the
" high-priest asked him, Art thou the Christ? Jesus
" said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe;
" and if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me
" go. Then the high-priest answered and said unto
" him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell
" us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.
" Then said they all, Art thou the Son of God?

" Jesus saith unto them, Thou hast said; I am. Never-
" theless I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see the
" Son of Man sitting on the right-hand of power, and
" coming in the clouds of heaven.

" Then the high-priest rent his clothes, saying, He
" has spoken blasphemy, what farther need have we of
" witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blas-
" phemy. What think ye? They all condemned him,
" and answered and said, He is guilty of death.

" Then some began to spit on him, and they did
" spit in his face. And the servants, and the men who
" held Jesus, mocked him, smote him and buffeted
" him. And they blindfolded him, and struck him on
" the face; and asked him, saying, Prophesy unto us,
" thou Christ, who is he that smote thee? And many
" other things blasphemously spake they against him.

A PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, whose merits are infinite! as we proceed in the consideration of the history of thy sufferings, we humbly pray thee to grant us the assistance of thy good spirit, to enlighten our understandings, and to incline our wills to submit to the influence of all those valuable truths which are here taught. Impart a blessing to our meditations, to the praise of thine infinite love, which moved thee to suffer for our sake. Amen.

CHAPTER I.

CHRIST BROUGHT BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL COURT OF THE JEWS.

"*And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to*
"*Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas who*
"*was high-priest that same year. Now Caiaphas was*
"*he who gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient*
"*that one man should die for the people. And they led*
"*Jesus away to Caiaphas the high-priest, where the*
"*scribes and elders were assembled.*"

In these words we have an account of the bringing of our blessed Lord before the spiritual court of the Jews. We find that he was brought,

First, Before Annas, one of the chief priests.

Secondly, Before Caiaphas the high-priest.

I.

"They that had laid hold on Jesus led him to Annas."

With respect to the persons who brought him thither, they are not expressly specified; but are mentioned in general terms. Both Jews and Gentiles had laid hands on Christ in the garden, and both were doubtless engaged in hurrying him to the place where the unjust sentence of death was to be passed upon him.

Our blessed Lord, after eating the paschal lamb with his disciples at Jerusalem, had gone out of the city, over the brook Kidron, and passed through the valley of Jehoshaphat, to the Mount of Olives; where,

after his agonizing conflict, he was delivered into the hands of his enemies by the treachery of his disciple Judas. Now, he was again led from Gethsemanè into the city. Some are of opinion, that the multitude, instead of going the direct way with him, took a circuit by the sheep gate. Through this gate, the sheep which were designed for sacrifices and kept in the adjacent pastures, were brought into the city, to be sacrificed in the temple, which stood opposite to this gate. By this same way, the true Lamb of God, which was to be offered up for the sins of the whole world, is supposed to have been led into the city.

Secondly, The persons, before whom our blessed Lord was brought, are described.

"They led him away to Annas first." This Annas, whom the Jewish historian Josephus calls Ananus,* was a person of high dignity at Jerusalem; for he had not only been high-priest for several years, but had five sons who were all successively advanced to that office; to which he now saw even his son-in-law, Caiaphas, promoted. But the particular circumstance by which he is here described is, that he was father-in-law to Caiaphas. This, seems to have been the motive for bringing our Lord first to Annas's house, who probably might have advised the measures adopted for the apprehending our Lord. What passed in this house, with regard to our blessed Lord, the evangelists do not specify. Some indeed, are of opinion, that he was here interrogated, and was denied by Peter for the first time, and struck on the face by an officer; because St. John, after relating these particulars, concludes this part of the narrative with these words,

* Jews' Antiquities, Book 20, chap. 8.

"And Annas sent him bound to the high-priest Caiaphas." But it was not in Annas's house where these things happened; and these words of St. John ought therefore to be included in a parenthesis.*— We shall here make the following inferences.

1. The children of darkness, in many things, show themselves wiser than the children of light. How careful were the soldiers and officers of the Jews to hold fast the Lord Jesus, and lead him away, after he had fallen into their hands! How willing likewise was the former high-priest, Annas, to renounce his sleep, and sit up till midnight, to enjoy the malicious satisfaction of seeing Jesus of Nazareth secured and bound! Which of us uses such diligence in the service of our blessed Saviour? And when we are blessed with the visits of this divine guest, where are those who say with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;"† who willingly forego their ease, and their sleep, when an opportunity offers of showing kindness to Christ in his distressed members; and who, with David, rise up at midnight to praise the Lord "for his righteous judgments?"‡ Is it not true, that we are surpassed by these children of darkness, who were much more active and diligent to injure our blessed Lord, than we are to serve and hold communion with him?

2. The many weary steps of the blessed Jesus, are also to be reckoned among his meritorious sufferings. We behold him led from the garden of Gethsemanè to the house of Annas; from Annas to Caiaphas, from

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* The English translators render this verse, very properly, (Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high-priest.)

† Gen. xxxii. 26. ‡ Psalms, cxix. 62.

Caiaphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, from Herod again to Pilate, from Pilate's seat of judgment to Mount Golgotha. He was led bound like a public malefactor, and a disturber of the peace. His sinless soul was sensibly touched by the rude sarcasms, taunting reflections, and bitter imprecations and blasphemies, which were poured out by the outrageous multitude. His body, which, but a few hours before, had been extremely weakened by his agony and bloody sweat, was barbarously handled, bruised, and spurned by the inhuman soldiers; so that the Messiah's complaint in the Psalms, "They thrust sore at me, that I might fall;" * was here literally fulfilled.

3. The suffering Redeemer has, in his sacred person, sanctified the abusive treatment, which his suffering members meet with; who may often say with St. Paul, "We are made a spectacle to the world." † It is a great comfort to Christian martyrs for the truth's sake, to consider, that such sufferings are sanctified by the adorable Son of God, who trod the thorny path before them.

II.

The person before whom our blessed Saviour was next brought, was Caiaphas, "who was the high-priest that year." It was not the first year of Caiaphas's pontificate, he having some years before been raised to that high office by the favour of the Roman Governor; but this circumstance, that he "was the high-priest that same year," seems to allude to the great irregularities practised at that time, with regard to the high priesthood. It seldom happened in that age, that any one held this office until death, according to the divine institution; but the fa-

* Psalms, cxviii. 13. † 1 Cor. iv. 9.

mily of Herod, and the Roman Governors, used to dispose of it to the highest bidder; or, from other indirect motives, to take it away from one, and bestow it on another. In the space of one century, which intervened from the reign of Herod to the destruction of Jerusalem, twenty-seven high-priests were deposed out of twenty-eight, some of whom scarcely bore the dignity a year. In the year of our Saviour's passion, Caiaphas was still high-priest, and continued such for several years after.—We here behold the true high-priest over the house of God, whom God had appointed and confirmed with an oath, standing as a prisoner in bonds before the Jewish high-priest, whose office was only a shadow of the real dignity and importance of his priesthood.

Caiaphas is described by a very remarkable circumstance; for St. John observes, that it was he who had advised the Jews, "that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." * Our Lord having raised Lazarus from the dead, by which miracle multitudes were induced to believe on the name of Jesus, the scribes held a consultation in order to put a stop to this growing evil. "What do we?" said they, "for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation."† Upon this, Caiaphas the high-priest delivered his sentiments in the remarkable words here quoted. Though this counsel of Caiaphas was uttered in the spirit of prophecy, yet he himself appears to have been actuated by bitter enmity against our Lord. His own meaning seems to have been this: 'Supposing this Jesus of Nazareth to

* John, xviii. 14. † John, ii. 47.

be an innocent person; yet it is better, for once, to set aside the rules of justice and equity, and make a sacrifice of them to the public welfare, than that the Jewish nation should be deprived of its liberty; for it is to be apprehended, that the Romans will avail themselves of the disturbances arising from this man's doctrines, and come and take away both our place and nation.' He appears to have spoken with the greatest acrimony, reproaching his colleagues with their weakness and want of penetration, because they did not see the necessity of putting Jesus of Nazareth to death at all events. "Ye know nothing at all." As if he had said, 'When imminent danger hangs over our heads, we must not stand consulting with conscience, but bring the affair to a speedy conclusion.' Thus Caiaphas appears to have been a person of a hardened conscience, full of hatred and malice against the Lord Jesus. It was probably a cause of great joy to him that this iniquitous advice was carried into execution during his pontificate. Nay it may be presumed he received many congratulations on the event, as having saved the Jewish nation.

The rest of the assistants who composed the council are described in the following words: "The chief priests, and elders of the people, and the scribes came together." Hence it appears that most of the members of the Sanhedrim were present, to consult on the means of bringing Jesus of Nazareth to a trial. This meeting was the more extraordinary, as it was not customary in cases where life was concerned, to hold a sessions in the night; it was also a very august assembly, consisting of the most distinguished characters of the Jewish nation. But the prince of darkness was the president of this court; so that justice was

not to be expected there. It was an assembly, of which Jacob would have said, as he did of Simeon and Levi, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united! Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel." *

It was not without the divine decree, that the Son of God was now brought before this judicature. Shiloh was to make his appearance, whilst a lawgiver was still among the Jews †. Accordingly he who "was made under the law" was now brought before judges sitting in Moses's chair. We shall make a few further observations on the passage now considered.

1. The followers of Christ, like their Divine Master, have been frequently sacrificed, under pretence of restoring public tranquillity. The men of the world still excite opposition and clamour, and pretend that true Christians are such dangerous men, that it is necessary for the public welfare that they should be discountenanced or degraded. These stratagems of the world were conspicuous in the sufferings of our blessed Saviour.—Let not the children of God be offended, if such should happen to be their case.

2. He, who considers only the external dignity of the enemies of Christ, may easily be misled. Great personages were assembled in the house of Caiaphas the high-priest; yet Satan made use of these as his instruments to condemn the Son of God. These aged and refined politicians, and profound scholars, not withstanding all their wisdom, knew not God; but rejected and "crucified the Lord of glory." ‡ Therefore let no one be deceived by such external advan-

* Gen. xlix. 6. † Gen. xlix. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 7.

tages as a high character, an eminent post, splendid titles, profound learning, and apparent candour; qualifications which we often meet with in the enemies of God's cause; while their hearts are filled with hatred, and a dislike of the truth.

3. It is to Christ's standing before a human tribunal, that we owe our discharge from the just tribunal of God. We had transgressed the divine law, and for that violation were liable to condemnation. But our Surety, who had fulfilled all righteousness, here condescends to be falsely accused, and unjustly sentenced to die, that we, by his innocence might be freed from the just accusation of a broken law. Whoever with true penitence acknowledges his transgressions, though he be condemned by the law as a malefactor, if he humbly pray to the Lord not to enter into strict judgment with his servant, and if by a lively faith he lay hold on the merit of his Redeemer, "shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." * But this salvation, which was purchased at so dear a rate, is of no benefit to the impenitent and unconverted. These must be brought before the supreme tribunal, and receive the just sentence of death. "Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord."

PRAYER.

O Lord and Saviour! we thank thee for suffering thyself to be brought before an earthly tribunal, to deliver us from judgment before the tribunal of heaven. Preserve us from taking offence at thee or thy cross,

* John, v. 24.

and give us grace, from thy sufferings before this relentless tribunal, to derive strength to endure persecutions, and to continue faithful till death! Amen.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST FALL OF PETER THE APOSTLE.

"*Simon Peter followed Jesus afar off, and so did another* "*disciple, to the palace of the high-priest. That other* "*disciple was known unto the high-priest, and went in* "*with Jesus into the palace of the high-priest. But Peter* "*stood at the door without. Then went out that other dis-* "*ciple who was known to the high-priest, and spake unto* "*her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. And the* "*servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of* "*coals, for it was cold; and they warmed themselves:* "*and Peter went in and sat among the servants, and* "*warmed himself at the fire, that he might see the end.* "*Then the damsel, who kept the door, beheld Peter, as-* "*he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and* "*said, This man was also with him: Thou also wast* "*with Jesus of Nazareth the Galilean. Art thou not one* "*of this man's disciples? But he denied it before them* "*all, saying, Woman, I am not; I know him not, neither* "*understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into* "*the porch; and the cock crew.*"

I.

THIS account of the occasion of Peter's fall, relates *first*, the causes of it; and *secondly*, the denial itself.

As to the remote cause of his fall, two circumstances prepared the way for this heinous sin, namely, his

following Christ; and his indiscreetly entering into the high-priest's palace.

1. The first remote cause then was, his following Christ. But is it credible, that the following our blessed Lord should so far mislead Peter, as to occasion his denying his master? yet it was even so. He who followed Jesus was Simon Peter, the oldest of all the disciples. At first all the disciples "forsook him, and fled:" but Peter recollecting his promise, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake:* though all should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended;"† turned back, and followed Christ at a distance. This appears, in the first instance, a commendable action; as it showed, that the love he bore to his Lord was not extinguished; but Peter in following Christ at this juncture fell into several sins. He sinned against God's providence, by plunging into danger on the strength of his own good resolutions: he sinned against his master, by presumptuously acting contrary to what Jesus had expressly told him, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now;"‡ which words of Christ he by this action would confute, and show that what his master had declared impossible, he could nevertheless perform. He also erred by mixing among the enemies of Christ; and by wishing to exalt himself above the other disciples, and to display a superior courage and resolution in following his master.

His companion was another disciple. By that other disciple most commentators understand St. John: but some conjecture, that this was not one of the twelve apostles, but some inhabitant of Jerusalem, who was

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* John, xiii. 37. † Matt. xxvi. 33. ‡ John, xiii. 36.

in his heart secretly convinced of the truth of our Saviour's doctrine, but for fear of the excommunication with which the Sanhedrim had threatened all that should profess the doctrine of Christ, concealed his sentiments.

2. The second remote occasion of Peter's fall was his entering into the high-priest's palace.

The other disciple of Christ was admitted into the court, among those who brought Jesus thither. In the mean time, Peter was obliged to stand without at the door. It may seem that the door was carefully guarded, lest a tumult should arise, and some of his followers should force their way into the palace, with a view of rescuing Jesus. "Then went out that other disciple, who was known to the high-priest, and spake to her that kept the door, and brought in Peter." This disciple cannot be supposed to have had any ill intention, and might imagine that he conferred a favour on Peter, by procuring him admission into the high-priest's palace. Peter likewise would be happy to get admitted; but it proved his greatest misfortune.

A good inclination, if not under the direction of the word of God, is often very dangerous. Peter thought he acted a laudable part in following the Lord Jesus, and venturing into the high-priest's palace. But as in this his good intention he paid no regard to the word of God, viz. "Thou canst not follow me now," it proved a dangerous snare to him. This is the case of thousands. If they intend well in any particular action, you can never convince them that they act amiss, though they cannot produce any command or promise of God to warrant their proceeding; at length their fall unhappily proves their temerity and want of reflection. Good intentions are mere blind impulses

when they are not under the guidance of God's will, as declared in his word.

3. As to the more immediate cause of Peter's fall, it is observed; "And the servants and officers stood there, and had made a fire of coals, for it was cold; and they warmed themselves." Peter also went, and sat among the servants, and warmed himself by the fire.

His intention was, to see what would be the issue; and in the mean time to hear what the servants thought of Jesus, and what was their expectation as to the event. But he had long before heard from the mouth of the blessed Jesus himself, that he should be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles; that they should scourge him, revile him, and put him to death on the cross. This prophecy he seems to have forgotten.—By mingling in the crowd he might hope to escape observation; but it happened here, as it frequently does when a man despises the means which God has pointed out for his preservation, that the plan by which he hoped to escape, proved the occasion of his fall.

Another immediate cause of Peter's sin, was the speech of the damsel, who kept the door; of whom it is said, that "she earnestly looked on Peter;" and asked him, "Art thou not also one of this man's disciples? Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." The damsel draws the attention of the officers and servants to St. Peter, "This man was also with him." We may suppose the eyes of all the company to be fixed on Peter. The only crime with which he was here accused, was that he was one of Jesus's disciples. But this accusation, in such a place, and at such a juncture, was sufficient to endanger his life; and Peter

did not hesitate to utter a direct falsehood, in order to avoid the threatening danger. We shall make the following observations.

1. When a person has once departed from the ways of God, every step he takes brings him nearer his fall. We see how Peter went on step by step into temptation. He trusted to his own strength; and having said, he would go with Jesus to prison and to death, his temerity prompts him to turn back and follow his master, and at last to enter the palace, and mingle among the servants. So proud is frail man, that he will not confess his weakness. Thus a youth admonished to beware of bad company, replies that he is able to govern himself. He is unwilling to pass for a precise, gloomy, or unsociable person; and therefore joins in conversation or in actions which are displeasing to God, and wound his own conscience. The tempter soon seduces him still farther, till at last he is led to the commission of gross sins. Let none then be rash and presumptuous, or confide in themselves. We cannot expect the divine protection and assistance, if we run wilfully into danger.

2. The real disciples of Christ cannot long be concealed among the people of the world. Had Peter, like the rest, inveighed against Christ, and ridiculed his doctrines, he might have avoided all suspicion. But as he remained silent, or possibly was sometimes unable to suppress his emotions, under his violent inward perturbation, he was soon suspected to be one of the disciples. Thus it is still with the children of God, when they mingle with the wicked. They are not long undistinguished from those about them, and others think it strange that they run not with them into the same excess of riot: so that however they

may wish to conceal themselves, they will not remain long undiscovered. They must be put to the test, whether they will suffer contempt and ill-treatment for the sake of Christ.

II.

We come now to the account of Peter's first denial of Christ. "He denied it before them all," saying, (according to the harmonized account of the evangelists,) "I am not;" I am no disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. "I know him not;" I have no acquaintance with the man, and have no connection with him. 'I know not what thou sayest; I understand not your meaning.' So strongly did Peter dissemble, as if he never had had any thing to do with Jesus of Nazareth, and did not in the least care what became of him. He was as it were thunder-struck; and all his boasted resolution disappeared at this one attack. He began to faint at the first appearance of danger.

After giving this first proof of his weakness, he went out into the court, near the gate which opened into the street, and behold, "the cock crew." His conscience told him, that he had grievously sinned against his master; and the voice of conscience was confirmed by this incident, since it reminded him of his master's words; namely, "This night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."* Hence we may draw the following inferences.

1. The Spirit of God calls sins by other names than those which depraved reason gives them. Peter probably thought, 'What right has this woman to ask me, whether I am a disciple of Jesus? As she has no

* Mark, xiv. 30.

authority to question me, I am not obliged to tell her the truth. I have said nothing tending to scandalize, or defame my master; and what service would it do him, if I should bring myself in danger of my life? As my confession can do him no good, he will not take it ill, that I pretend I do not know him.' Thus would he extenuate the sin of denying Jesus Christ before men. Christ has said, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven."* Peter here committed a sin of the deepest dye. In time of distress "he made lies his refuge,"† instead of relying on the protection of God. He broke his solemn promise so recently made; "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee."‡ He was ashamed of that master whom he knew and had publicly acknowledged to be the Son of God; and thus he strengthened the enemies of Christ in their wickedness.

2. An immoderate love of life and worldly ease, will lead us to deny our Saviour. When any danger occurs for the sake of the gospel, if these are dearer to us than Christ and his religion, nay if we are not ready and willing to offer them up to him who has given his life a sacrifice for us, we pave the way for a denial of Christ and his word. We are not to think those words of Christ a hard saying, "If any man come to me, and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple."§ It should be sufficient that the Lord Jesus

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* Matt. x. 32. † Isaiah, xxviii. 15. ‡ Matt. xxvi. 35.
§ Luke, xiv. 26.

will support and strengthen us; that he has promised to give us a better and more durable existence, in exchange for this wretched and transitory state; and to recompense the short momentary sufferings of this life, with an eternal weight of glory.

3. Peter's denial of Christ was a considerable aggravation of our Lord's sufferings. Certainly it was not without design, that all the four evangelists (though some more circumstantially than the others) have inserted this incident in the history of the passion. The spirit of prophecy had before declared, that it would be a part of the Messiah's sufferings, that his lovers and friends should stand aloof from his sore.* How would this base ingratitude and perfidy of Peter wound the faithful heart of the blessed Jesus! How deeply must it have affected him, that the subtil fiend had prevailed over the most intrepid and the eldest of the apostles; for whom he had particularly prayed, "that his faith might not fail."† We also must consider that all our inconstancy and infidelity contributed to increase the sufferings of Christ. We, in the person of our first parents, entered into a connection with Satan the grand enemy of God, and ventured into danger, actuated by an useless but fatal curiosity. We too, denied the Lord our creator, and, as it were, impiously said, "I know thee not:" "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" Often have we behaved as strangers to our Lord and Master, when our profession of attachment to him might have drawn some inconvenience or danger on our heads. For all these sins our Redeemer suffered; praised be his holy name for ever!

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* Psalms, xxxviii. 11. † Luke, xxii. 32.

PRAYER.

O most faithful Saviour! We bless thee that in thy word thou hast given us lessons and examples, which may make us wise unto salvation. Preserve us from all rashness, sinful curiosity, and presumption, and from reliance on our own strength. Withdraw our hearts from the love of earthly things, and make us to value nothing so inordinately, as to be willing to forfeit thy favour to attain it. Enable us to renounce that love of temporal ease, which might induce us to deny thy truth. May we be ready to lay down our lives, rather than to deny thee in the day of trouble, or be denied by thee before thy Father and his holy angels. May we henceforth show fidelity and constancy in all trials and temptations! Amen.

CHAPTER III.

CHRIST INTERROGATED THE FIRST TIME BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL JUDICATURE.

"The high-priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of "his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to "the world; I ever taught in the synagogues, and in the "temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret "have I said nothing: Why askest thou me? Ask them "who heard me, what I said unto them: Behold they know "what I said."

THESE words inform us how our blessed Lord was first interrogated before the spiritual court of the Jews.

First, The person who put the question was Caiaphas the high-priest. It had been the insidious practice of our Lord's enemies, to propose to him ensnaring questions, in order to draw from him some unguarded expression, for which they might accuse him; and the same crafty method was observed in this instance. It was indeed a duty incumbent on the high-priest, to keep a watchful eye on the purity of the doctrines taught in Israel, lest any false prophet should arise and draw the people to apostacy, introduce pernicious errors, and disturb the peace of the church. But in the present inquiry, this zeal for purity of doctrine was a mere pretence. It was a hypocritical question, in which the love of truth had no share; but which proceeded from inveterate malice. It had been determined to destroy Jesus, however innocent, as the only expedient, in the opinion of Caiaphas, for saving the Jewish church. Here this impious Pontiff endeavours by insidious questions to draw something from our Saviour, on account of which he might pronounce sentence of death upon him with some appearance of justice. He does not venture at once to accuse a person who was perfectly innocent; but first by examining him, would procure matter to form a charge upon.

Secondly, The purport of his question is related: "The high-priest asked Jesus concerning his disciples, and his doctrine." Jesus had been brought hither in the night with swords and staves; but Caiaphas's own conscience sufficiently convinced him, that Jesus had done no evil. Our blessed Saviour was known throughout Judea to be a public benefactor; so that Caiaphas himself could not charge him with any thing criminal. He therefore thought it more politic, to question the

prisoner concerning his disciples and doctrine. He first inquires respecting his disciples; and would induce our Lord to discover the names of his followers and adherents, and to give an account by what authority he had made choice of the apostles, and drawn after him such a number of the people.

The high-priest further asked concerning his doctrine: what the substance and design of it was; and whether it agreed with the law of Moses, and the traditions of the elders. As the drift of the first question, concerning his disciples, was to accuse our Saviour of seditious practices, of setting himself up to be a king, or endeavouring to gain to himself a party; so the other question, relating to his doctrine, was intended to convict him of heresy, as having deceived the people, and seduced them to depart from the law of Moses. Heresy, and departure from the law of Moses, were offences punishable with death in the spiritual court; and the charge of sedition was calculated to induce the civil power the more readily to put the sentence of death, passed by the ecclesiastical court, in execution. Such appears to have been the design of the high-priest in asking these questions. We shall observe on this head;

1. That the greatest injustice is practised in the world under the most plausible pretences. Nothing could be more iniquitous than the whole process carried on against our Saviour. The resolution had been taken that Jesus should die; and it was now contrived by captious and ensnaring questions, to extort from him a confession, by which he might be implicated in a crime worthy of death. There was the appearance of a candid examination and inquiry into the nature of his doctrine; but the whole was mere out-

side show, intended to deceive the people. Thus the Son of God expiated the various kinds of injustice which are practised in the world under the appearance of equity. How often is a zeal for the honour of God and purity of doctrine made the pretence, under which a faithful servant of God is molested and injured! This should teach us an abhorrence of all indirect proceedings, dissimulation, and artifice; and if we are already stained with such iniquities, we should seek mercy in the atonement of Christ.

2. A consideration of the insidious questions, which the Son of God permitted to be put to him, should check our proneness to useless and unprofitable questions in the examination of divine truths. Christ has thus atoned for the impertinent curiosity to which we are often prompted in divine things; and which tends to no edification. How often do we summon the Almighty before the tribunal of arrogant and presumptuous reason, and require an account of his decrees and proceedings, or even arraign his wisdom and justice!—In the instance before us, Christ has also sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, when in times of persecution they are ensnared by insidious questions.

3. It is not unusual for the best designs, and most laudable actions, of the servants of God, to be unjustly suspected by the world. Christ in choosing his disciples had the most beneficent views; the doctrine which he taught was nothing less, than a declaration of the counsel of God concerning our eternal salvation. Nevertheless, both the choice of his disciples, and the purity of his heavenly doctrine, were loaded with an unjust suspicion. His appointment of disciples was

regarded as a seditious design, and his pure and salutary doctrine incurred the suspicion of heresy. Thus he was to atone for our depravity, in being so ready to put the worst construction on the designs, words, and actions of our neighbour, and to impute to him intentions of which he is innocent. Our blessed Lord has sanctified the sufferings of his servants when they are oppressed with false and undeserved suspicions, and when their innocent views and designs are branded with the worst constructions. When a Christian meets with the like ill-treatment, let him reflect: "Was my Saviour no better treated? Were his words and actions misconstrued? What am I, that I should be better treated than my Lord and Master?" This consideration will also induce him to put the most favourable construction on the conduct of others.

In our blessed Lord's answer to the foregoing question, he passes over in silence the first part of it, which concerned his disciples; probably because this point was answered in his defence of his doctrine: for his view in appointing disciples was that they might asssist him in its promulgation: so that by proving that no suspicion of heresy or sedition could be charged on the doctrine, he at the same time vindicated the appointment of disciples to promulgate it.

As to the second part of this question, which related to his doctrine, Jesus returned a more direct answer. He informs the high-priest in what manner, and where he taught; "I spake openly to the world;" or, as he says in another place, "I spake to, or before the world, what I have heard of the Father."* He had declared the truth to all who were willing to hear it;

* John, viii. 26.

and this was no more than his enemies acknowledged, when they said to him: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men."* He did not preach one set of doctrines among his friends, and another quite opposite to it, when he observed any spies or informers mingled with the crowd. On the contrary, he uniformly adhered to the truth, and declared it indiscriminately to the consciences of all men, before audiences of every kind.

Our blessed Lord further mentions the places in which he taught, namely, in the synagogues, and in the temple, whither the Jews from all parts usually resorted. He made use of those public places in which God's word was read and explained. He adds, "And in secret have I said nothing." Christ it is true often preached in the desert, on mountains, and even in private houses, but never in a clandestine manner. Every one was at liberty to hear what was said; nor were spies or informers debarred of access. And when he sometimes discoursed privately with his disciples, or with other persons, as with Nicodemus,† it was on no other subject, but what he publicly taught and inculcated. Some things were more clearly explained to his disciples, that they might communicate them to others, as we read in St. Mark; "And when he was alone, they that were about him, with the twelve, asked him of the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables."‡ But it was

* Matt. xxii. 16. † John, iii. ‡ Mark, iv. 10.

his express injunction to his disciples, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light; and what you hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house tops;" * and our Lord himself openly delivered what he accounted conducive to the happiness, and necessary for the salvation of mankind.

The second part of our Lord's answer, consists of a remonstrance to the high-priest; censuring his method of proceeding, and proposing a more effectual means of coming at the truth. "Why askest thou me?" As if he had said, 'Can the person accused bear witness in his own cause? If I were to give you a detail of my doctrine, and lay open to you the whole system, so that you yourself could not make any just exceptions against it, you would then accuse me of dissimulation. He dares not, (you would say,) in our presence, avow his heretical opinions; but when he is among the poor ignorant populace, he imperceptibly infuses into them the poison of his doctrines.' Thus he shows that this manner of inquiring after truth was neither just nor satisfactory. Instead of it, he proposes the proper mode of coming at the truth, "Ask them who heard me, what I said unto them: behold, they know what I said." These words manifest the justice of Christ's cause: it was the answer, not of a dispirited, affrighted criminal; but of a person of wisdom, intrepidity, and resolution. This divine teacher could appeal to the consciences of his hearers; nay, he is not afraid that his cause should be tried by his enemies. Possibly, the very officers who had been sent to apprehend Jesus, but who returned without him, saying, "Never man spake like this man," † might be then standing before

* Matt. x. 27. † John, vii. 46.

the door of the hall. These and any other witnesses should have been heard; and the truth might have been discovered. Besides, this was the method of proceeding appointed by the Jewish law; witnesses were to be confronted with the person accused, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses the truth should be established: and the high-priest is justly reproved by the Lord Jesus for neglecting this prescribed method of proceeding in judicial cases.

Some important doctrines may be here inferred.—1. A faithful servant of God ought to face the enemies of truth, with becoming firmness and resolution. Christ who has gone before us as an illustrious example, has also obtained for us strength to imitate him. A servant of God might be discouraged by the consideration of his weakness, and the power of his enemies; but Christ, who with his spotless innocence covers the failings of his servants, has acquired for them the power to appear undaunted before their enemies. Freedom and courage, in a good cause, are quite consistent with humility and discretion. This discourse of our Lord flowed from a laudable zeal for the honour of his character, which was unjustly branded with the suspicion of heresy. Such an undaunted answer the high-priest might little expect from a person who stood bound before him as a prisoner, and whom he had already pre-judged.—Our Saviour has thus obtained for his people the privilege of a firmness on such occasions; nor are they in the least culpable when they make use of it, within the limits of discretion and decorum.

2. A good conscience is the source of true freedom and resolution. Of this we have here an instance in our blessed Lord. As he was not conscious of any

heretical or seditious designs, he could with boldness repel such aspersions. Whoever will imitate Christ in this particular, must have a pure conscience. The men of the world often show themselves bold and resolute, and put on the mask of confidence, which, in fact, is mere presumption; nor does it last any longer, than while conscience is asleep, and ceases to perform its office. But when the conscience is awakened by the voice of God, and presents before the sinner the black catalogue of his secret sins; then he is appalled, and his assumed boldness and intrepidity vanish. The children of God, whose consciences are appeased by the blood of the Lamb, possess a true firmness, which even the children of this world cannot forbear secretly admiring, though they are strangers to the cause from whence it flows. Have we then just ground for such a boldness and confidence? Is this foundation laid in us? Or do our consciences reproach us with some heinous and unrepented sins, of which we dread the discovery, as it would expose us to shame and confusion? If the latter be our case, we have reason to be afraid. Let us hasten to the fountain, freely opened for sin and uncleanness; to the blood of the Son of God, which is the only balm for an accusing conscience. And let every one endeavour to preserve a conscience void of offence. If we show no regard to the voice of conscience now, it will one day be heard; filling us with terrifying reflections, and painful remorse: if on the other hand, our conscience be purged from dead works, and resigned to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, it will befriend us through life, and comfort us at the awful hour of death, and in the day of judgment. Whoever endeavours to walk before God with a pure conscience, may follow the example

of his Saviour with humble confidence; and if his words and actions are misconstrued, may make a similar appeal: 'I have spoken and acted openly in the face of the world; I have no sinister designs; I am conscious of no bad intentions. The omniscient God is the judge of my secret thoughts; he knows that the intents of my heart are sincere before him.' Thus may a good Christian look his enemies in the face, and nobly despise their groundless suspicions, and calumnies; for if he is absolved by his own conscience, he is well assured that, in the day of the Lord Jesus, his innocence will be made manifest in the presence of assembled men and angels.

3. A true Christian ought to avoid all appearance of evil.* This maxim, which St. Paul lays down, the Son of God has illustrated by his example; and he has, at the same time, imparted strength to his followers to walk in his steps. They should therefore use all diligence to walk cautiously and without offence, amidst a sinful generation; considering that many eyes are intent on their actions, and that the world gladly lays hold on very opportunity of calumniating them. If, notwithstanding all their caution, their most innocent words and actions are scandalously misrepresented by the world, let them comfort themselves by the example of their Saviour, who was traduced without a cause: and let them recommend their cause to God.

4. As the doctrines of Christ were openly promulgated, so are they to be openly and cheerfully professed. St. Paul, in the name of all Christians, says: "We are the children of light and of the day." † Instead of being ashamed of Christ's religion, we are to

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* 1 Thess. v. 22. † 1 Thess. v. 5.

own it in the face of the world; for it contains nothing contrary to the principles of sound reason, nothing which clashes with our ideas of God and his attributes. Whoever is ashamed of the Christian doctrine; nay, whoever does not in heart and mouth profess it; as it were, reproaches his Lord and Master, and brings on him an unworthy suspicion, like the false accusation in the Jewish Sanhedrim; namely, that he went about clandestinely, propagating such doctrines as could not bear the light. When no persecution arises, it may be easy to profess the faith of Christ without reserve; but in seasons when the profession of Christianity exposes men to reproach and suffering, it requires more real courage and fortitude than can be derived from unassisted nature. Since our blessed Saviour, therefore, by his holy firmness and intrepidity, has acquired the same gifts for his people; let us humbly entreat him, so to convince our hearts of the truth of his heavenly doctrines, that we may not hesitate to make an unreserved profession of his religion; and as it becomes the children of light, and of the day, to lay down, if required, our lives for his sake.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living Saviour! write in our hearts the wholesome doctrines which we have learned. Bring to the light of thy gospel those who are prone to hypocrisy, deceit, and the works of darkness. Discover to them the depravity of their hearts; impress on their minds salutary shame for their offences, and renew them to salvation; that they may henceforth walk before thee in real purity and uprightness of heart. Make each of us strictly careful to preserve

a good conscience, as the source of all true courage and confidence, that we may be comforted amidst the groundless suspicions and accusations, with which the world may load us for the sake of the gospel! Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNJUST TREATMENT OF CHRIST AT HIS FIRST EXAMINATION BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL COURT.

"*And when Jesus had thus spoken, one of the officers, who "stood by, struck him with the palm of his hand, saying, "Answerest thou the high-priest so? Jesus answered "him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but "if well, why smitest thou me? (Now Annas had sent "him bound to Caiaphas the high-priest.)*"

THESE words exhibit to us the unjust treatment of our blessed Saviour at his first hearing.

We may observe, *first*, wherein this ill-treatment consisted; *secondly*, the plea that was urged for it; and *thirdly*, our Saviour's behaviour on this occasion.

1. It is said, "When Jesus had thus spoken, one of the officers, who stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand."

This officer was so provoked at the boldness of our Saviour's answer, in the presence of the council, that he insolently offered this injury to his sacred person. Now it is not lawful for the officers belonging to a court of judicature, to anticipate the sentence during

the trial of a prisoner. This miscreant, however, well knew, that, on the present occasion, he might presume thus far; and that instead of being punished, or even reproved, he would rather be commended and rewarded for this insult done to the prisoner. Possibly, the high-priest himself made a sign to him to strike our Lord; as Ananias, another high-priest, expressly ordered St. Paul to be struck on the face, for answering him with the same undaunted freedom.*

The insult was a blow on the face, by St. John called ῥαπισμα, i. e. a stroke given with the palm of the hand on the cheek. Of all the ill-treatment which Job received from his friends, he accounts this the most sensible indignity; "They have smitten me on the cheek reproachfully."† Whoever struck an Israelite with his fist was obliged to pay a shekel, as a fine for the affront; but striking him on the face was liable to a much greater mulct; such a blow being accounted still more reproachful, and contemptuous. The indignity was the more heinous in this instance, if we consider that the person struck was the only begotten Son of God, the Lord of glory, whose face, but a little before, shone like the sun on Mount Tabor, and before whom the angels themselves veil their faces; and that the affront was offered to Christ in the presence of the high-priest and the judges of the Sanhedrim, who represented the whole Jewish nation.

Yet we are not authorized to inveigh against, to curse, and execrate the person who offered this indignity to our Lord; but should consider, that our manifold sins and impieties also had a share in it. These were the cause of all the contumely, disgrace, and pain,

* Acts, xxiii. 2. † Job, xvi. 10.

which the blessed Jesus underwent; and consequently must have contributed to the injurious treatment under consideration. Hence we may be convinced of the heinous and detestable nature of sin. We should never have imagined that sin is so detestable, were we not convinced of it by the sufferings of the Son of God. We may also learn the greatness of the love which Christ bore to mankind, in his willingly submitting to injuries and affronts, to redeem our lost souls, to deliver us from ignominious bondage, and to save us from that infamy and disgrace, and those eternal sufferings, which otherwise would have been our lot. As in every deliberate sin, we, as it were, lift up our sacrilegious hands against God, we must have been covered with confusion at his awful tribunal, and have been delivered up to be beaten with many stripes to all eternity, had not the Son of the Father, the angel of his presence, presented himself in our stead, and exposed his cheeks to the smiters. Oh, what unmeasurable love was displayed in this unparalleled meekness and patience of the Lamb of God! Let us express our gratitude to our blessed Saviour for his voluntary submission to this base indignity. Let us, when under the severest temptations, when the messenger of Satan buffets us, think on this impious blow which Christ suffered, and derive comfort. Let us also pray to our faithful Redeemer, that he would make us willing, for his sake, to undergo the greatest ignominy and contempt.

2. As for the plea that was urged for this injurious treatment of our blessed Lord, it is contained in these words: "Answerest thou the high-priest so?" By this plea, he who offered it would justify the action,

and represent it as an instance of his zeal for the honour and dignity of the high-priest.

3. We are to consider our blessed Lord's behaviour on this provoking occasion. Though he suffered, he threatened not. Yet he was not entirely silent at such a public insult, but with equal discretion and mildness, complained of the injury.

"If I have spoken evil"—the phrase in the original,* does not signify, 'if I have spoken evil things, lies, slander, calumny, against the high-priest;' but 'if I have spoken in an ill, rude, and indecorous manner, and violated the respect due to the high-priest;' for in this consisted our Saviour's pretended crime. They thought he grossly offended the high-priest, in the form and manner of his defence. The demand, therefore, appears a just one: 'If I have been wanting in the respect which the high-priest requires, *bear witness of the evil.* I here stand in the presence of the whole court. If I have violated the respect due to the high-priest's person and dignity, I ought to be accused of it, and convicted of the crime this the rules of common equity and justice require, and nothing can be more illegal and unjust than to begin with the execution, and punish a crime which has not yet been proved. *But if well,* i. e. if my words contained nothing criminal, rude, or disrespectful; if I have only spoken the truth with that decent freedom, which becomes a good cause and a good conscience, *why smitest thou me?*' This reproof is given by way of question, as it more emphatically sets forth the injustice of the pro-

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* κακως.

cedure. 'Why smitest thou me? *Thou*, who hast neither right nor power so to do, smitest *me*, who am not yet convicted of having committed any fault, to deserve this public insult.' This reproof, indeed, our Saviour directs to the servant who had given him the blow; but at the same time, it is his design to touch the consciences of every member of the council: for, however these judges might suppose that, as they sat in Moses's chair, and administered justice in God's name, all their decrees and sentences were to be obeyed; yet Christ intimates to them, that they allowed of iniquitous practices in their court, and that the fundamental principles of justice were here openly violated.

This is the import of our Saviour's remonstrance. He offered no resistance, and meditated no revenge. He did not command fire from heaven on the head of this impious wretch; nor that his hand should wither like that of king Jeroboam, when he stretched it out against the prophet: but our Lord stood unmoved among his enemies; ready to be struck on the other cheek, if the malice of this wretch had gone so far. So that the Lord Jesus acted conformably to the doctrines which he himself had taught. From this behaviour of Christ, we may learn the true meaning of his command in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew.* We see, that a discreet remonstrance, or a dissuasion from offering further injury, is by no means forbidden; but our Saviour's meaning seems to be this; that rather than have recourse to any violent methods, we ought, when denied the protection of the magistracy, patiently to bear injuries.

* Ver. 39.

Moreover, we are not only to admire this gentleness of the blessed Jesus, but also to propose it for our imitation. When the question is, whether we must conform to Christ, who did not retaliate the blow he received; or to the world, whose maxim it is, that a man of honour should revenge an affront or injury offered him, either with his tongue, his pen, or his sword; there is no one who has any real regard for the name of Christ, but will confess, that it is not the world, but Christ, whom he ought to imitate. If, however, notwithstanding this confession, we in our actions prefer the practice of the world to the example of patience and gentleness exhibited by Christ, we shall one day hear that dreadful sentence from our supreme Judge, 'Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant. Thou thyself couldest not but own my example was to be followed; and yet hast thou suffered thyself to be carried away by the corrupt stream of wicked custom. Thou art justly condemned with the world, since thou hast preferred its sinful ways.' We shall here draw the following practical inferences.

1. In bearing witness to the truth, we are to expect nothing but contempt, injustice, and insult. If God does not leave the hands of evil men at liberty to assault the witnesses of the truth, and insult them by acts of violence, they will exercise their malicious tongues with the greater virulence, in ridicule and calumny. The wicked will always hate those who bear witness that their works are evil. But it is infinitely better to suffer ourselves to be insulted as our master was, for a short time, than to be given up to everlasting shame and perdition. Let us not fear to bear witness to the truth, however obnoxious to the

world: and let us prepare to meet those sufferings which are annexed to such sincerity. This ought more particularly to be observed by those to whom the ministry of the gospel is committed. They must banish from their minds all fear of man, all false shame, and must prepare themselves for opposition.

2. The world never disregards the rules of equity and justice more, than in its proceedings against Christ and his followers. The servant of the high-priest probably durst not have taken the liberty of interfering at the trial of the murderer Barabbas, or any common malefactor. But against Christ and his members, the wicked presume that they may commit any violence.

3. The vices of masters are generally copied by their servants. As the high-priest, the head of the Sanhedrim, was unjust and unmerciful, so were his officers and servants. This officer well knew how far he might venture; and possibly, he might read in the high-priest's looks that it would be very acceptable to him if he thus checked the boldness of Jesus of Nazareth. As therefore the ill-example of the head of a family causes such offence, how great is the obligation of such, to set the best examples of piety and virtue to their servants and dependents.

4. The more ardently a person loves the Lord Jesus, the more will he be affected by every part of his undeserved sufferings. It is remarkable, that of all the evangelists, St. John only has taken notice of this blow, which was inflicted on our blessed Lord. Not that the other evangelists and apostles had no real love for their master; but as St. John was the Lord's bosom disciple, and, of all the apostles, loved him with the most tender affection, so he was in a

particular manner affected with every indignity, affront, and injury, offered to his beloved master. This we shall also experience, if our hearts are inflamed with an ardent love for the Lord Jesus. We shall particularly attend to every incident of his sufferings. Every thorn that pierced him, every stripe or blow which he endured, will sensibly affect us. An intimate fellowship with his sufferings, will be the result of a sincere love to him.

5. When we are more sensible of any injury done to our own character, or that of a friend, than to the honour of God, it is a proof that we do not love him supremely. Many are like this servant, whose zeal was all on fire at this supposed want of respect for the high-priest. They are transported with indignation at an affront done to a person for whom they have a particular regard, or even at a want of due ceremony towards him; whereas they can with great coolness see the honour of God violated in the most flagrant manner. It behoves every one to examine himself, whether he has a zeal for God, and is more concerned for the honour of his Saviour than for his own, or that of any other man?

6. The patience and gentleness of Christ exceed human comprehension. When we see the prevalence of wickedness and impiety in the world, we are apt to say within ourselves, 'How can God connive at such proceedings? How can he forbear hurling his thunder, and rousing the elements, to avenge his offended majesty?' But let us rather admire and adore his patience, and reflect, that it is to his mere mercy we are indebted for our own salvation.

We will now consider briefly a second instance of the unjust treatment, which our blessed Saviour met

with at his examination; and this consisted in his being bound, when he was examined: "Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas the high-priest." By taking notice of this circumstance, the evangelist means to show, that they proceeded against Jesus contrary to justice and equity, and to the customs of the Jews. For prisoners, when under examination, were loosed from their fetters, that they might answer with the greater freedom; but our blessed Lord was obliged to stand before his judges bound, with the manacles on his hands, as he was sent from Annas to Caiaphas. This circumstance, at the same time, adds to the enormity of the injurious blow which he received.

From the circumstance of Christ's having defended the truth of his doctrine with his hands bound, we may infer, that the truth of the gospel is not to be maintained by force. That method of propagating truth cannot plead the example of the founder of our religion. He would not allow his disciple Peter to use the sword in his defence: and when he himself vindicates his doctrine, his sacred hands are bound, and the only means he uses to defend the truth, are argument and persuasion. It is therefore a sure sign of an antichristian spirit, to use violence in propagating our religion.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living Saviour! praised be thy holy name for thine unparalleled patience, in bearing all the injuries, affronts, and indignities, inflicted on thee by cruel men. Thou art entitled to all honour, and adoration, as the image of the invisible God: but

thou hast, for our sake, offered thy sacred face, before which the very angels veil their faces, to be stricken and covered with shame, that thou mightest obtain for us boldness to lift up our heads before thee, and that we might not be overwhelmed with shame and confusion before thy tribunal. For this thine amazing condescension, we bless thee; beseeching thee, to make us willing, for thy sake, to suffer contempt and ill-usage from the world; and to account it our glory and crown, to be made like unto thee, the first-born among many brethren. Grant that we may rather choose to be despised, smitten, and reviled with thee, than to have for our portion, the perishable, sinful honours of the world; and finally, that after thy great example, we may finish our course with joy. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

PETER'S SECOND AND THIRD FALL.

" *And a little while after, as Peter was gone out to the*
" *porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that*
" *were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.*
" *Then one said unto him, Art thou not one of his disci-*
" *ples? But Peter denied it again with an oath, Man,*
" *I am not; I know not the man. And after a while,*
" *about the space of an hour, another confidently affirmed,*
" *saying, Of a truth, this fellow was with him, for he*
" *is a Galilean. Then they that stood by came up, and*
" *said to Peter, Surely, thou also art one of them; for*
" *thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto, and*
" *bewrayeth thee. One of the servants of the high-priest,*
" *(being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off,) saith, Did*
" *not I see thee in the garden with him? But Peter began*
" *to curse and to swear, and again denied it, and said,*
" *Man, I know not what thou sayest: I know not this*
" *man of whom ye speak.*"

In these words are related Peter's second and third fall. This wavering disciple had already denied his Lord and Master, and publicly abjured him. As to his second denial, it is said, " And a little while after, as Peter was gone out to the porch, another maid saw him." Thus, the second denial followed close upon the first. A few minutes after he had denied his Master the first time, he heard the cock crow. Now, as our Lord had before told him, that he should deny him thrice, before the cock should crow twice, it behoved Peter, by this admonition, to recollect himself, and to guard against any farther temptation. But

such was the perturbation of his mind, that he knew not what way to turn. He was sensible that he had unwarily intruded into a place of extreme danger, and therefore retired from the crowd which stood about the fire. St. Matthew informs us, that "he went out into the porch," which opened from the court into the street, in order to steal away unobserved. But so many eyes were fixed upon him, that probably he was thus prevented from putting his design in execution.

"As Peter was gone out into the porch," he was observed by the maid, (namely, she that kept the door,) who, from the very first sight of this stranger, had suspected him, and now began to say to those who stood by, 'This is one of them. However he may deny it, I am positive that he is one of Jesus's disciples.' Upon this came another maid, who knew him, and said to them that were there, "This man was also with Jesus of Nazareth." Thus Peter had two witnesses against him, who both agreed in charging him with being a disciple. This again drew the eyes of all upon him; they attentively looked him in the face, and put the question to him, "Art not thou one of his disples:" and one of them, after a more particular examination of his face, peremptorily said, "Thou art also one of them." This man either knew him better than the rest, or by his confidence attempted to frighten him into a confession. Thus the number of witnesses against Peter increased; and no doubt every word was a thunder-clap in his ears, and made his timorous heart tremble.

On this, unhappily succeeded Peter's second fall, which consisted in lies, and false oaths. At first it is said, "he denied it;" not only that he was a disciple

of Jesus, but that he ever had any knowledge of him. "I do not know the man." He, who once would not leave his Lord and Master, because he had the words of eternal life, now pretends that he never had any acquaintance with, or knowledge of him. He who formerly had made this glorious confession, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God,"* now calls him only a mere man, and publicly denies that he even knows him. But this is not all; he confirms the denial with an oath, because they had not believed him before on his bare word. Thus he not only transgressed the commandment of his master,† but called God to witness a falsehood, profaning his name, and defying his omniscience. We shall here make the following observations.

1. Satan violently harasses timorous souls. He knew how to make the greatest advantage of this temptation; and having succeeded in discharging his first arrow at Peter, he soon sent another, without giving him time for recollection. He would be too crafty for us all, did not a superior eye watch over us, and confound his designs for our ruin. This should induce us, when we have unhappily fallen, humbly to implore the divine assistance.

2. A desire of concealing any sin, often causes a greater to be committed. Peter having once pretended that he did not know Jesus, could not easily retract; but was induced from the fear of shame and exposure, and for the sake of his credit, to persist in the lie which he had uttered.

3. Light and false swearing is not only forbidden by Christ, but we see that it contributed to the aug-

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* Matt. xvi. 16. † Matt. v. 33.

mentation of our Saviour's sufferings. Every Christian ought therefore carefully to avoid that sin. How must the heart of the blessed Jesus have been pierced, at hearing Peter thus abominably profaning the name of his heavenly Father, and calling him, to whom all things are known, as a witness to a manifest untruth! But alas! nothing is more common among nominal Christians than such oaths and attestations, in order to gain credit in the most frivolous affairs, or to confirm lies and falsehood. On trivial occasions the sacred and awful name of God is profaned, or the soul, life, and salvation staked as a pledge. Our blessed Lord, it is true, has expiated these sins, and obtained pardon of them for those who sincerely repent; but if we would avoid the threatenings annexed to such crimes in the third commandment, let us abstain from this sinful custom.

St. Peter's third denial of Christ succeeded, "after a while," or as St. Luke says, "about the space of one hour." So much time, for recollecting and recovering himself, did the long suffering of God give to Peter, before he permitted the third and most violent temptation to assault him. This time should have been employed in repentance and fervent prayer to God, that he would draw his foot out of the snare, and open to him a retreat from this dangerous place. But his resolution to wait the issue of his Master's trial still detained him. He probably grew more secure and confident; and thought, that as he had already escaped, he should not again be suspected, and consequently that no farther assault was to be apprehended. Perhaps the better to conceal himself, he left the porch, and again mingled with the officers and servants.—

In this interval of an hour, many things had passed with relation to the Lord Jesus. False witnesses had been suborned against him; sentence of death had been pronounced; his sacred face had been spit on; and many opprobrious insults offered to him. All this Peter, undoubtedly, either heard or saw; and this shocking spectacle he could not behold without the most violent emotions. We have an account of the manner of his third assault.

"One that stood by," who by the light of the fire had a full view of him, said aloud before all the by-standers, "Of a truth, this fellow was also with him;" and as Peter had denied the charge, he adduced a proof of the truth of it from Peter's provincial dialect, "For he is a Galilean." The other servants who stood about the fire, pressed him more closely on this head, saying, "Surely, thou art a Galilean, for thy speech bewrayeth thee."

The next attack made the greatest impression on Peter, both on account of the person who accosted him, and the charge itself. The person was a servant of the high-priest, and a kinsman of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden. This man recollecting Peter's face, says, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" Thus Peter was convicted, not only of having formerly attended on Jesus, but of having the same night, and only a few hours before, been actively engaged amongst his disciples.

This attack is followed by Peter's third and most grievous fall. He denied the charge: "I know not the man of whom you speak;" "I know not what thou sayest." This denial he again confirmed with an oath. Nay he began to curse, to imprecate that God might inflict some signal punishment on him, and to renounce

his part in the kingdom of God, if he knew this Jesus, or was one of his disciples. Thus Peter preferred his life above his Lord and Saviour, and was more afraid of men than of God. Instead of going into court, and giving evidence in behalf of the accused, he stays without, and swears that he does not so much as know the prisoner, nor ever had any concern with him. We may observe here,

1. Satan uses every artifice to render the entrance into temptation easy, and the retreat difficult and hazardous. Peter had little trouble in getting into the high-priest's palace; a single word from an acquaintance procured admittance: but when he should have retired, a multitude of obstacles prevented him. Alas! how easily does sin allure us; especially when it promises worldly advantages. We insensibly contract an intimacy with it, and find it difficult to extricate ourselves. Let us lay this to heart, whenever we are enticed to sin. Let us consider the consequences; the remorse of conscience, the anguish and sorrow, which will ensue. Sin gathers strength by indulgence. Peter gradually became more and more involved in the temptation. His crime was first the denial of his Master; this he afterwards confirmed with an oath, and at last with curses on his own soul. This is a terrible instance of the different gradations of sin. Let not then its deceitfulness beguile us. Are we unhappily fallen? Have we been surprised by sin? Let us rouse ourselves without delay, and call upon God to deliver us.

2. The critical hour of temptation discovers the evil which lurks in the human heart. Peter never thought he could have fallen so deplorably. When warned of denying his Master, he would not believe

it; much less would he have been persuaded, that he should deny him with oaths and imprecations. He thought he had such a sincere love for Christ, that he could cheerfully go with him to prison and to death. But the temptation with which Satan sifted him, manifested the latent depravity of his heart. Possibly some may say, 'Had I been in Peter's place, I should have showed more courage and resolution.' To such it may be justly answered, "Thou also art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee." Whoever argues in this manner, little knows his own heart, or how far his boasted strength will support him in the hour of temptation.

3. The same crime as that of Peter, is still committed amongst Christians. Did Peter break his protestation, that he was ready to go to prison and to death with the Lord Jesus? We have instances of thousands, who at baptism, or confirmation; at the Lord's table, or on a bed of sickness, have vowed to give up their lives to the service of Christ, but who afterwards break those vows. Did Peter deny his Lord and Master? Alas! what is more common than for those who confess him with their lips, to deny him in their actions. Do not the covetous and ambitious, the intemperate and unchaste, the revengeful and passionate, deny the humble, pure, forgiving Jesus? Though all these may make their boast of Christ, and call themselves by his name, yet in their actions they say, "I know not the man." Was Peter by his pusillanimity and fear of man prevailed on to utter a falsehood? What is more common amongst professing Christians, than to make use of expressions contrary to the purity of truth? And if Peter, in a moment of

extreme danger, was prompted to grievous sins, and surprised by sudden temptations; many commit the very same sins, only for the sake of a fleeting pleasure, or petty advantage.

PRAYER.

Omniscient and ever-living God, who knowest our hearts better than we ourselves, keep us, we beseech thee, from an overweening opinion of our own strength and sufficiency. May we every moment learn to depend on thee, and to implore thy Almighty aid to secure us from temptation. Grant, O Lord, that from the example of Peter, and his grievous fall, we may be more cautious in avoiding all opportunities which may lead to sin; and that when we are unhappily fallen, we may implore thy mercy to raise us up again, for the sake of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECOVERY OF PETER AFTER HIS FALL.

"*And immediately, while Peter yet spake, the cock crew*
"*the second time. And the Lord turned, and looked on*
"*Peter: and Peter remembered the word of the Lord,*
"*how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow twice,*
"*thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept*
"*bitterly.*"

HAVING considered Peter's fall, we now turn our thoughts to his recovery, and observe how he was again raised up by his Lord and Saviour. His fall

proceeded from his weakness; and to rise again was beyond his own ability. We may notice,

First, The means by which he was awakened to contrition; and *secondly*, the signs and fruits of his repentance.

I.

As to the means by which he was awakened to repentance, it is first said, "Immediately, while he was yet speaking, the cock crew the second time." When Peter had denied his Master the first time, he heard the crowing of the cock: but his mind at that time seems to have been so occupied with apprehensions of danger, that it made no impression. The second crowing of the cock however, made a deep impression. He had begun to curse; and to aver with the most terrible imprecations on his soul, that he was not a disciple. But this sound interrupted his impious career. "While he was yet speaking, the cock crew:" upon which, Peter was immediately struck dumb; his oaths and imprecations were silenced, and he now bent his thoughts on getting away from this dangerous place.

Another means of leading Peter to repentance, was a penetrating look from the blessed Jesus: "The Lord turned and looked on Peter." This look penetrated into his inmost soul, and awakened his conscience. What imagination is capable of forming an idea of this look of the Son of God, the express image of the Father! Though an affectionate, and at the same time a majestic sweetness always beamed forth from the eyes of the Lord Jesus, yet there must have been something extraordinary in this piercing look, which had such a wonderful effect on Peter's heart. What strong emotions would it express! No doubt, a com-

passionate love mixed with grief, and an ardent desire of reclaiming his disciple, appeared in the countenance of Jesus; and a beam of divine grace darted into the soul of Peter. Though we do not read that our Saviour spake a single word, his expressive look would excite a train of reflections. Peter would read in his Master's countenance his unalterable affection, notwithstanding his own infamous perfidy. He would imagine himself thus addressed: 'O Simon! art thou a stranger to this well-known face? Have I deserved this ingratitude at thy hands, which grieves my very soul? Is it not enough, that the traitor Judas has betrayed me? Must I also be shamefully denied by thee? Where are thy promises, and boasted resolution of going to prison and to death with me?' These, or ideas of like import, were doubtless suggested to the conscience of Peter, roused and awakened by his Master's piercing look.

A third motive to repentance was excited in the mind of St. Peter, by the recollection of our Saviour's words, forewarning him of his fall. His memory recalled the prophetic warning of his Lord and Master, "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." It doubtless occurred to his mind, how injuriously and basely he had behaved towards the Lord Jesus; how arrogantly he had set himself above all the other disciples, and what mighty things he had promised, relying on his own strength; without having made good the least of his protestations. What anguish must have overwhelmed his soul at the recollection! The spirit of grace, at the same time, might remind him, of some consolatory expressions of Christ; that he was his Mediator, and had prayed for him, that his faith might not fail: otherwise he probably

might have sunk into a dejection of mind, which might have ended in despair. Hence we learn the following truths:

1. It is a peculiar mark of the divine favour, when God calls a second and third time to a soul, which has once heard his awakening voice. Peter, instead of attending to the first crowing of the cock, which should have brought him to reflection, suffered it to pass unheeded; yet the indulgent providence of God permits him to be again admonished and summoned to repentance, by the same incident. O the wretched folly of those, who abuse the goodness of God, and make light of the invitations and admonitions of his compassionate love, calling them to repentance! This fatal neglect they often excuse under a pretence, that their present circumstances will not allow of entering on the work of repentance and reformation; that these awakenings and friendly motions will be followed by others; that God will bear with them some time longer; and as they are not without a purpose of being converted, they flatter themselves that access to the throne of grace will still be open. They forget that the heart is gradually hardened in sin; that God's Spirit will not always strive with man; and that if his first inviting and gracious call be slighted, he generally accompanies any subsequent calls with sensible chastisements, which might have been avoided by compliance with his first invitation. Let every one, therefore, commune with his own heart, and reflect on the frequent summonses to repentance, with which God has favoured him in the course of his life. If these intimations be neglected, he is in the utmost danger of being finally hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

2. Our indulgent and merciful Saviour turns towards the sinner, even before the sinner turns to him. Before Peter looked on Jesus with compunction, Jesus had looked on Peter with eyes full of pity. Thus it daily happens. Grace prevents the wretched sinner; touches his depraved heart, and even offers him life while he is still in his blood. Let none plead, that it is out of his power to convert himself: it is only required of him not to reject the preventing grace of the Saviour, when he kindly looks on him in his misery; but to allow it admission into his heart, there to begin, carry on, and complete the work of conversion. O that men would attend to the gracious voice of God, calling them to repentance by his spirit, word, and ministry!

3. As this expressive look of our Lord awakened Peter to a recollection of his Saviour's words, so the word of God, like seed thrown upon the earth, often lies buried in the memory for a time, without producing any salutary effect, yet afterwards produces the fruits of repentance and conversion; when the Lord by his Spirit impresses the sinner's mind with a conviction of its truth.

II.

What passed inwardly in Peter's heart, the evangelists have left to our own reflections; but they have specified the external signs, which evidenced his repentance. With regard to these, the three following particulars occur in the gospel.

1. Peter quitted the high-priest's palace. He could not think of continuing a moment longer in the place where he had so basely denied his Lord and Saviour. The sight of his Master's enemies grew insupportable to him.

2. He covered his face; for that is the proper sense of the Greek word used by St. Mark: he cast or drew one end of his upper garment over his head,* so as to cover his face; as was usual with mourners, or persons under affliction, that they might not see, or be seen by others.† By thus covering his face, he showed his grief and shame.

3. He gave vent to his tears: "He went out, and wept bitterly." The anguish of his heart was too violent to be any longer suppressed; but burst forth like a torrent. The sincerity of Peter's repentance was afterwards evidenced by abundant fruits. He never relapsed into the like fault; but boldly, and even unto death, professed the faith of Christ. Hence we may observe,

1. That the first sign of a real conversion, is the forsaking the society of the wicked. Thus Peter instantly, and without delay, withdrew from the company of those by whom his fall had been occasioned. It behoves every one to ask his own heart, whether he is entangled in society, from which he is so far from reaping any benefit, that it is prejudicial to his purity and peace of mind? And whether, under the conviction of this fact, he has the courage manfully to declare for his Lord and Saviour, and separate himself? This is one of the most usual obstacles to the conversion of a sinner. The society of such persons often stifles all the workings of grace in the well-disposed mind, and creates an aversion to serious thoughts. Let no one

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* In the English translation, "When he thought thereon," *i. e.* when he cast (his thoughts), or according to others (his garments); neither of the substantives being expressed in the original.

† 2 Sam. xv. 30., xix. 4.; Jer. xiv. 3.

excuse himself, and say, I have not resolution to quit such company, though I sincerely wish it; for we may be assured, that as God opened a way to Peter to escape, when he was really inclined to do so; he will show the like kindness to us, and assist our endeavours with his all-sufficient grace.

2. As Peter was pardoned and received into favour, no sinner ought to despair of mercy. Whilst those Christians, who have the strongest faith and resolution may be alarmed at Peter's fall, his repentance may inspire the most wretched sinner with a hope of acceptance with God. That merciful hand, which was held out to this sinking apostle, stopped him short amidst the most terrible imprecations, and snatched him from perdition, can also lay hold of thee, O sinner, and draw thee out of the mire of sin, that thou sink not. Peter's repentance should therefore be a source of comfort to every wounded conscience, every troubled and dejected mind, which begins to have a sense of the greatness of its sins, and sees into what an abyss of misery it has plunged itself. Christ is both able and willing to deliver every soul that earnestly implores his aid; it redounds to the glory of his grace to wrest from the dominion of Satan a sinner apparently lost beyond all hope, to change his obdurate heart, and to display the wonders of mercy and redeeming love in rescuing his soul from destruction. This instance of Peter's reception into favour may afford the greater comfort and joy to wounded spirits, if they reflect that our Saviour, when he conversed with Peter after his resurrection, never upbraided him with his heinous offences. No sooner had he bewailed his baseness and recovered from his fall, than his merciful Saviour permitted the whole transaction to be buried in oblivion, and received

him again into favour. Thus, O repenting sinner, shalt thou also partake of his free mercy. Thy former profligate life, and heinous transgressions shall be eternally forgotten; they shall not be objected against thee at the tribunal of God; they shall be cast into the depths of the sea, so as never to rise up against thee in judgment. Thy compassionate mediator caused the repentance of Peter to be recorded in the history of his sufferings, that thou mightest thence know the salutary fruits of his passion, and avail thyself of them, to thy comfort and salvation. Arise from thy fall; thy Saviour is willing and ready to help thee. Obstruct not the influence of divine grace, which will produce in thee penitence and godly sorrow. Weep bitterly, that thou hast denied the Lord that bought thee: hope in his grace, and be assured that thy hope shall not be disappointed.

PRAYER.

O blessed Jesus, faithful and adorable Saviour! we praise thee for the glorious example of mercy, which thou hast shown to thy fallen disciple Peter, to the comfort and support of repenting sinners in all succeeding generations. Praised be thy name, who, in the midst of ignominy and ill treatment, when the sentence of death was passed on thee, didst not forget thine unhappy fallen disciple, but, by a look expressive of pastoral care and tenderness, didst recall this strayed sheep from his wanderings. We believe, O blessed Jesus, that in thy present exalted state thou retainest the same affectionate love and compassion towards the meanest sinner, as in the days of thy humiliation. Visit our hearts with thy loving kindness; and let

this example make such a deep impression on our minds, as may inspire us with hope in thy mercy, and preserve us from sinking into despair. Look on us with pity and compassion, when we are unhappily fallen; and visit us with thy grace, that we may return into the way of salvation. Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE LORD JESUS DURING THE UNJUST PROCEEDINGS OF THE SANHEDRIM.

"*Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council,*
"*sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;*
"*but found none. Yea, though many bare false witness*
"*against him, their testimony agreed not together. At*
"*the last, came two false witnesses and said, We have*
"*heard him say, I am able to destroy this temple of God*
"*that is made with hands, and within three days I will*
"*build another made without hands. But neither so did*
"*their witness agree together. Then the high-priest arose*
"*and stood in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, An-*
"*swerest thou nothing? What is it that these witness*
"*against thee? But Jesus held his peace, and answered*
"*nothing.*"

THESE words exhibit to us the behaviour of the Lord Jesus during the unjust proceedings of the Sanhedrim. In which we shall

First, Consider the iniquitous proceeding of that assembly.

Secondly, Christ's behaviour.

I.

It may be thought strange, that the whole council should meet at so late and unseasonable a time of the night in the palace of the high-priest, and that they did not appoint a select committee for conducting their designs. But they might wish the people to believe, that the prosecution carrying on against Jesus of Nazareth was an affair of such urgent necessity, as to require their members to forego their usual rest, and, contrary to established custom, to sit in the night. Another motive probably was, that Pilate, the Roman governor, might conceive a higher idea of the importance of the trial; and the more readily be induced to order the execution of the sentence.

In the circumstances of the trial there was the show of regularity and justice: the method prescribed by the law of Moses was observed, and witnesses were heard. Moreover, though the law required but two or three witnesses in capital cases,* they went beyond this injunction, and produced numerous witnesses, who accused the holy Jesus of the most heinous crimes. But these witnesses were the most abandoned of men, hardened against all sense of shame. Some of their depositions were utterly false; and by others, they perverted the true meaning of the words of Jesus, in order to prove a criminal intention.

We are informed that "the council sought false witness against Jesus:" these either were bribed by the council, or must have voluntarily offered themselves for the sake of favour or advantage. The intention of hearing them was, not to ascertain the truth, but to

* Deut. xvii. 6.

give a specious pretext to that sentence of death, which the council had long before determined among themselves to pass. But these means, contrived to effect so wicked an end, were not successful. These suborners of false witnesses were disappointed: for it is said, "they found none," i. e. they did not find sufficient evidence, on which they might pronounce sentence of death on the prisoner. Besides, after several false witnesses had given in their evidence on oath, it is added, "their testimony did not agree;" but they contradicted and invalidated each other. This first attempt having proved abortive, the council proceeded to a second contrivance, the examination of two witnesses; by whose testimony they might wrest and pervert words which had been actually spoken by our Saviour.

"There arose certain, and bare false witness." From these words some would infer, that these two false witnesses were members of the Sanhedrim; who had hitherto kept their places, but now rose up in order to make their depositions. "We heard him say, I am able to (I will) destroy this temple of God, which is made with hands, and within three days I will build another, made without hands." These words allude to what Jesus had said in the beginning of his ministry; which was, consequently, at least three years before. Our Lord had then said, as recorded by St. John, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* These words were now scandalously perverted: for Jesus therein prophesied of his death and subsequent resurrection. He showed, how the temple of his body, in which his divinity dwelt, would

* John, ii. 19.

be destroyed by death; but that on the third day, by his almighty power, he would raise it up again, and restore the breathless corpse to life. Their testimony concerning these words was false in several particulars. Our blessed Lord's words were, "Destroy this temple:" but they pretended that he had said, 'I will destroy this temple.' As a proof that Christ meant the temple at Jerusalem, they add, "that is made with hands;" words which our Saviour had not used. They also depose, that he had said he would build "*another* temple made without hands." On the contrary, our blessed Lord's words were, "I will raise *it* [the same temple which they should demolish] in three days."

But this second attempt to oppress the innocence of our Lord succeeded no better than the former. We find that their testimonies agreed not together. Though there were only two witnesses, yet, it may be presumed, that they differed from each other in the circumstances of place, time, &c. Their design, however, was to represent Jesus as a vain-glorious boaster, who would undertake things beyond the power of man to effect: thus the Jews had before reproached Christ, saying, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"* They would also represent him as an enemy to the whole Jewish nation, which acknowledged the temple at Jerusalem as the only place appointed for the public worship of God; as well as to the order of the priesthood, who served in the courts and sanctuary. Another design of this accusation was, to represent our

* John, ii. 20.

Lord as an enemy to the God of Israel, who dwelt in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple, and whose majesty was insulted by the menace to destroy that edifice: and our Lord's assertion, that he should build another temple, would be interpreted into a scheme to abrogate the temple-worship prescribed by God, and introduce a religion of his own invention. The effect of all these calumnies and misconstructions was however prevented, since the witnesses did not agree: and the judges must have been extremely perplexed, on finding that the innocence of Jesus still shone with unsullied lustre. Here the following observations arise.

1. The accusation of our Saviour, by false witnesses, ought to be looked upon as a considerable part of his sufferings. All these persons, by whom the blessed Jesus saw himself surrounded, were so many instruments of the devil, who instigated the judges to condemn him, and the witnesses to give false testimony. Satan's aim was, to fix a blemish on the person and doctrine of Christ, and to stagger the minds of those who believed on him. That our blessed Saviour was not unconcerned at these grievous accusations, but had a very painful feeling of them, is evident from his bitter lamentations, long before uttered in the prophetic Psalms of David. "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not." * "The mouth of the wicked, and the mouth of the deceitful, are opened upon me. They have spoken against me with a lying tongue." † If St. Paul reckon among the sufferings of Christ the contradiction of

* Psalms, xxxv. 11. † Psalms, cix. 2.

sinners,* how much more grievous must the perjury of these false witnesses have been! But it was to atone for our perjury, lying, and falsehood, that the Son of God suffered a host of false witnesses to rise up against him. His merit, however, belongs to none but true penitents, who mourn and weep for the many sins they are conscious of, and have an utter abhorrence of all the works of Satan. To such persons this meritorious suffering of the blessed Jesus is a city of refuge, where they shall find safety from the pursuit of the avenger of blood.

2. Never did the innocence of the blessed Jesus shine with greater lustre, than when the utmost efforts were used to obscure it. God confounded some of the enemies of Christ by the means of others, and so perplexed the false witnesses, that, quite contrary to their intentions, they evinced our Saviour's innocence. Though many false witnesses presented themselves, yet none agreed in their depositions. If only two had so agreed, no doubt sentence would have immediately been passed, according to the law of Moses, which says, "At the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall the matter be established."† But the very contrivances of Satan, for oppressing the innocence of Jesus, were over-ruled by the wonderful providence of God, so as to display his innocence. Unquestionably the Son of God saw the hand of his heavenly Father in this proceeding; and this would prove a powerful consolation to him; and animate him to enter on his sufferings with the greater resignation and cheerfulness. Such a high-priest of unsullied innocence, and perfect holiness, in whom no guilt could be found, did our case

* Heb. xii. 3. † Deut. xix. 15.

require. The innocence of our Mediator thus appearing through all false charges, must be our shield against the just accusations of the law and our own consciences. Alas! with what a crowd of witnesses does a sinner find himself surrounded; when accused of having offended the majesty of God, and wilfully transgressed his commandments; of having hated God, injured his neighbour, and polluted his own body, which ought to have been the temple of God! Heaven and earth, all the creatures whom he has abused, and the places where he committed his abominations, either alone or in concert with others, witness against him. "For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." * The very members of his body, which he yielded as instruments of unrighteousness, reproach him for his sins. Then the sinner may say from fatal experience, "Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me." † Then it is, that he first learns to place a due value on the innocence of Christ, which was so virulently assailed; then he becomes acquainted with the transcendent benefit of these meritorious sufferings; and finds that behind this shield only he can be safe from the accusations of the law and of his own conscience. If his gracious Mediator interpose; if he invalidate the accusations, by offering himself in the sinner's place; if he say to his heavenly Father, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom;" ‡ the sinner, who already felt the sentence of death in his conscience, is raised to hopes of life and immortality; and by faith triumphing over the terrors of death, cries out with holy confidence, "Who shall

* Habak. ii. 11. † Job, x. 17. ‡ Job, xxxiii. 24.

lay any thing to my charge? It is God that justifieth! Who shall condemn me? It is Christ who (after being unjustly sentenced to be crucified) died, and rose again, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for me." *

II.

We are to remark the silence of the blessed Jesus, under the accusations of the Jewish Sanhedrim.

It is said, "Then the high-priest stood." He arose from his seat full of anger and pretended zeal, his mind being violently agitated. As he now despaired of procuring a sufficient foundation for convicting Jesus of any capital crime by the deposition of witnesses, he turned his thoughts on extorting something from our Saviour's own mouth, in order to condemn him. He therefore asked him, "Answerest thou nothing to what these witness against thee?" By this question, he hoped to induce Jesus to answer to the charge. It was the duty of the high-priest to have punished the perjured witnesses: "If a false witness rise up against any man, to testify against him that which is wrong, the judges shall make diligent inquisition; and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother, then shall ye do unto him as he had thought to have done to his brother; so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. Thine eye shall not pity him." † But the high-priest, on the contrary, countenances and protects the witnesses who had deposed against our Lord, and by his authority supports their evidence, as if it had contained accusations worthy of an answer.

* Rom. viii. 33. † Deut. xix. 16.

Upon this, the Lord Jesus was silent: "Jesus held his peace, and answered nothing." As these lying testimonies carried their own confutation with them, Jesus, who well knew when to speak and when to be silent, did not open his mouth, to vindicate his innocence. His silence implied a sufficient answer to this incoherent evidence. Besides, an answer was useless; for the council had already pre-judged Christ, and had suborned these witnesses merely for a show, or rather a mockery, of justice. They had allowed one of the officers of the court to strike Jesus on the face, when he desired to be legally tried. He therefore wraps himself up in silence; recommends his cause to his heavenly Father; and, with a serene, tranquil mind, patiently waits the issue. As his unrighteous judges had unknowingly fulfilled what had been predicted by the spirit of prophecy concerning the subornation of false witnesses against the Messiah; so now the Lord Jesus designedly accomplishes what had been foretold by the prophet concerning Messiah's silence on that occasion: "As a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."* Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. A person, whose mind is disturbed by passion, is most unfit for inquiring after truth. Of this we have an instance in the Jewish high-priest, whose agitation of mind on this occasion would not permit him to sit calmly during the trial.

2. A lie usually confutes itself. It is inconsistent, and built on a sandy foundation. Whatever evil is spoken of us by others, if it be false, let it never disturb our peace. It is the language of pride, indeed, to

* Isaiah, liii. 7.

object, 'How! shall I suffer such calumny? what will the world think of me? will it not be said, that my silence is a confession of guilt?' But the meek followers of Jesus, though they know, that in matters which concern the honour of God, discreet apologies and vindications are not prohibited, yet have learned to forego their own honour, and in silence and suffering to imitate the Lamb of God, who opened not his mouth. When lies and calumnies are so notorious and palpable, as to carry with them their own confutation, we should choose rather to be silent: to recommend our cause to God, and patiently to wait for his aid; and in the mean time, proceed unmoved in a course of innocence and integrity. This is the best way to overcome envy and slander; for the fire quickly dies, for want of fuel. It is the true Christian's constant maxim in such circumstances: "I will be dumb, and will not open my mouth, because it is thy doing." *

PRAYER.

Merciful and gracious Father! blessed be thy name for bringing to light and publicly manifesting the innocence of thy beloved Son, by the contradictory testimony of his enemies; and for applying his spotless perfection as our defence and shield against the accusation of Satan and our consciences. Bring us to the knowledge and confession of our depravity. Convince us of our guilt, that we may cease from justifying ourselves at thy tribunal, and seek protection under the shadow of our sinless Mediator's wings. May his innocence be our refuge at the hour

* Psalms, xxxix. 9.

of death, when the enemy accuses us, raises up false witnesses against us, and places before our eyes all the wickedness which we have committed during the course of our lives. Then sprinkle our consciences with the propitiating blood of our Lord and Saviour, so that our accuser may be utterly confounded, and we may depart hence secure of thy favour, and full of a lively hope of eternal felicity. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of the innocence of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FURTHER EXAMINATION OF CHRIST; AND HIS GOOD CONFESSION BEFORE THE JEWISH SANHEDRIM.

"*And straightway in the morning, as soon as it was day, "the chief priests, the elders of the people, and the scribes, "took counsel against Jesus to put him to death; and "they led him into their council; and the high-priest "asked him, Art thou the Christ? Jesus said unto them, "If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I ask you, ye "will not answer me, nor let me go. Then the high-priest "answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living "God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son "of God. Then said they all, Art thou the Son of God? "And he answered, Thou hast said: I am. Nevertheless "I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man "sitting on the right-hand of power, and coming in the "clouds of heaven.*"

In these words we have an account of the further examination and good confession of Christ, before the Jewish Sanhedrim.

1. Here is mentioned the time when this was transacted. It was "early in the morning, as soon as it was day." During the night, the Sanhedrim had spent some time in examining our Saviour,* and afterwards had delivered him into the hands of soldiers and servants. But no sooner did the day begin to dawn, than the whole council assembled again; either, as some think, in a large apartment in the temple, where they commonly used to meet; or, as others, with greater probability imagine, in the house of Caiaphas. They assembled before sun-rise, that no time might be neglected for the dispatch of their wicked purpose.

Oh! that the children of light were as careful to redeem the time, as these children of darkness, "who sleep not except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall."† These ought to put many thousands of indolent professors to the blush, who had rather omit the service of God, than in the least abridge themselves of their natural rest. Are the slaves of Satan so early abroad for the execution of their wicked designs, which they

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* Dr. Macknight is of opinion that Christ was brought to the high-priest's palace about midnight; that the trial did not commence till about three in the morning; and that the interval was occupied in convening the council, procuring witnesses, &c. He supposes the day would begin to dawn between 3 and 4 a. m.

Dr. Rambach not only adopts the idea of two distinct examinations, one about midnight, and the other at an early hour of the day, but supposes that after the first trial and *condemnation* of our Lord, by the Sanhedrim, they were again convened; and that they again examined and *condemned* him.—The Editor has incorporated the 8th and 11th chapters of Dr. Rambach, into the present chapter; so that the second examination may precede the condemnation of our Saviour.

† Proverbs, iv. 16.

will not delay? And shall not the children of light, who have such important affairs on their hands, and are candidates for a never-fading crown of glory, avail themselves of the morning hours, when the mind is calm and serene, and best disposed for spiritual meditation, prayer, and devout exercises? Our Saviour, who appeared so early before the judgment-seat of the Jews, has obtained for us the privilege of early approaching the throne of grace. Let us therefore, henceforth use this precious privilege with greater humility, gratitude, and assiduity.

2. The examiners and their assistants are here mentioned. All the chief priests, i. e. all those persons who either were descended from any of the high-priests' families, or had themselves actually held that office; the scribes, who studied the law of Moses, and explained the writings of the prophets; and the elders, who sat in Moses's chair, and enforced the observance of the political law. Thus, all the members of the Sanhedrim or great council were assembled. What is in itself sinful and iniquitous, is not however rendered more just or legal, by a great number of suffrages. A bad cause is still bad, though it be patronised by thousands, and have the sanction of the most respectable and numerous assemblies.

3. We are informed what was the design of their meeting. "They took counsel against Jesus to put him to death." It was their fixed resolution that he should die; and they now met to consult further on the readiest and safest means for putting this design in execution. The condemnation of the Messiah was not a sudden thing, but was done with mature deliberation; a circumstance which highly aggravated their guilt in the sight of God.

4. We proceed to consider the behaviour of the high-priest. No doubt, he was exasperated beyond all patience, when not only his subornation of witnesses had proved abortive, but also his new expedient of drawing something from the mouth of the party accused was frustrated, by the silence of our Saviour. He now accosts the prisoner with another question; to which he adds a solemn adjuration to confess the truth: "Art thou the Christ?" i. e. 'Dost thou publicly own thyself to be that Messiah, whom God promised by his servant Moses and the prophets, and whose coming has hitherto been expected by the Jewish church?' "Art thou the Son of the Blessed?" i. e. 'Dost thou pretend to be a person of the same essence with the blessed God, and standing in such a near relation to him as that of a son to a father?' These Jewish doctors knew, that God, in the writings of the Old Testament, had made mention of his Son. They were well acquainted with those passages in the Psalms, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." * "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father: Also I will make him my first-born." † They likewise remembered, that Jesus had declared himself to be the Son of God: for on restoring sight to the blind man, he asked him this question: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And when the man demanded, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" Jesus replied, "It is he that talketh with thee." ‡ They also remembered, that he had publicly said, "I and my Father are one." § As Jesus was now in his power, the high-priest again brings forward this im-

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* Psalms, ii. 7. † Psalms, lxxxix. 26. ‡ John, ix. 35.
§ John, x. 30.

portant point, which had given so much offence; and inquires, whether our Lord will now acknowledge himself to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Happy would it have been for the Jewish pontiff, if this question had proceeded from a well-disposed heart, a sincere love of truth, and a desire of believing in Jesus if he should prove to be that divine person. But this was an ensnaring question, and designed only to draw a confession from our Saviour. The chief priests had long since made a decree, that if any man should confess that he was Christ, or the Messiah, he should be put out of the synagogue;* and had more than once threatened to stone him, for pretending to be the Son of God.† So that the question was designed to pave the way for accusing our Saviour of blasphemy, that they might pronounce on him the sentence of death. To this important question Jesus replied: and his answer contained a mild reproof of his judges, representing to them their unbelief and obstinacy.

Their unbelief is reproved in these words: "If I tell you, ye will not believe." 'If ye will not acknowledge me to be the Messiah, from the works which I have done, especially the divine miracles which I have wrought, much less will ye believe me on my bare word.' This reproof the Saviour uttered with the most sensible concern for the unbelief and obduracy of his judges. He had earnestly laboured, during the course of his ministry, to bring the Jews to a belief that he was the Messiah. He had declared to them the terrible consequences of their unbelief; "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."‡ On the other hand, he had represented to them the

* John, ix. 22 † John, viii. 59., x. 30 ‡ John, viii. 24.

glorious privileges, and inestimable benefits, of faith in the Messiah: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." * But all these endeavours of the benevolent Jesus had made no impression; and he was inwardly grieved to see how these wicked men would die in their unbelief, and consequently would perish.

Their invincible obstinacy is represented: "And if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go." The meaning of these words is, 'If by proposing other questions, I should endeavour to put you in the way of truth, yet such is your obstinacy that ye will give me no answer.' This behaviour of the Jews, Christ had more than once experienced. Thus, it is said by St. Luke, "And behold there was a certain man before him, who had the dropsy. And Jesus answering, spake unto the lawyers and pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace." † This had been usual with them before, when Jesus freely conversed with them, and he knew they would behave in the same manner now that he was their prisoner. However unable they might have been to answer his questions, or to resist their force, they would not have set him at liberty, for it was already determined to put him to death at all events. He therefore represents to them their iniquitous designs, showing at the same time, that he knew their secret thoughts and intentions.

Upon this followed a solemn adjuration by the high-priest, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God:" and a question from all the assembly; "Art thou the Son of God?" Our Lord's reply is contained in these

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* John, vi. 47. † Luke, xiv. 2.

words, "Thou hast said: I am; nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right-hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Being adjured by the sacred name of his heavenly Father, the reverence which he bore to it would not permit him to be any longer silent; so that he now gave a direct answer to the high-priest's question. This reply of our Lord includes,

A plain and unreserved confession; and a farther illustration and confirmation of it.

The confession is made in these words, "Thou hast said." The import of these words is as if our Lord had answered, 'Yes; it is as thou sayest.' Hence St. Mark expresses it thus, "I am;" i. e. 'I am the Messiah, foretold and described by the prophets, and whom they have described as a king, a high-priest, and a prophet: I am the essential Son of the blessed God.' This manner of expression is very emphatical; for it is the same as if our Saviour had said: 'I am the Christ or Messiah, and the Son of God, in the very sense in which you use these words in your question.' Now, the idea which the Jews at that time annexed to this high title, the Son of God, was that it implied an equality with God; so that he who declared himself to be the Son of God, made himself equal with God in honour, majesty, and essential perfections. This is evident from the following passages in St. John's gospel: "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, not only because he had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his father, making himself equal with God."* And again,

* John, v. 18.

"The Jews answered him, saying, for a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God:"* namely, because Jesus had said, 'I am the Son of God.' The high-priest, therefore, by asking Jesus if he was the Son of God, was desirous to know, whether he claimed an equality with the God of Israel in divine attributes and perfections, and consequently to be adored and worshipped as the God of Israel.

Upon this, our blessed Saviour answered, "Thou hast said:" "I am;" i. e. 'I do acknowledge myself to be the Son of God; and this not in that low sense in which all believers are termed Sons of God, but in that exalted sense which you signify by this title in your question.' It were wrong to imagine, that our blessed Saviour, who was the true and faithful witness, had recourse to mean subterfuges on so solemn an occasion. It evidently appears that the high-priest and the council actually took Christ's answer in this sense; not as a dubious one, but as an explicit acknowledgment, that he was essentially the Son of God, and equal with the Father; for the high-priest rent his clothes, and cried out, as it were, in phrenzy, "He hath spoken blasphemy: what farther need have we of witnesses?" With this we may compare another passage,† where our blessed Saviour was before accused of blasphemy on the same grounds, namely, for having declared himself the Son of God. Hence it incontestably appears, that the high-priest from this confession concluded, that Jesus, whom he looked on as a mere man, arrogated to himself, under the title of the Son of God, the divine essence, and ex-

* John, x. 33. † John, x. 36.

alted himself to the throne of God. Therefore this confession of our Lord is particularly remarkable, as it overturns the Socinian system, and corroborates our faith, which acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth to be very God, whom all created beings are bound to honour as they do the Father.

Our Lord adds a confirmation and illustration of his divine Sonship: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right-hand of power." Here Jesus refers to the Psalms, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right-hand." * The Supreme Being is frequently represented, in the Old Testament, sitting on a lofty throne, and as a king ruling over all. † Now when our Lord says he shall sit at the right-hand of God, this can mean nothing else but that he shall reign jointly with his Almighty Father, and have a share in the accomplishment of his decrees, the administration of his government, and the conquest of his enemies. He was to sit at the right-hand of power; or, as St. Matthew expresses it, "to him all power was to be given in heaven and on earth." ‡ Another proof is taken from his returning in the clouds; for our blessed Lord adds, "And coming in the clouds of heaven." Here he seems to refer to a passage in the prophet Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven; and he came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him." § The clouds of heaven

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*Psalms, cx. 1. †2 Chron. xviii. 18.; Isaiah, vi. 1.; Psalms, xcix. 1.
‡Matt. xxviii. 18. §Dan. vii. 13.

are represented in the poetical imagery of scripture, as the chariot of Jehovah: "He maketh the clouds his chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind." * "Behold, the Lord rideth on a swift cloud," saith the prophet. † Now the Son of Man, by appropriating to himself this description, and assuring the Jews that he should hereafter be seen coming in the clouds of heaven, shows that he is the Son of God in such a sense, as in honour and dignity to be equal to his Father.

He also speaks of his coming forth from the Father, to manifest his great glory, and alludes not only to the last judgment, when his glory will be displayed in the most conspicuous manner, and when he shall judge and condemn those who impiously condemned him, but to his coming on various occasions, from his ascension to the end of the world, and especially his coming to enlarge his kingdom, and abolish the Jewish polity. Of this coming, he speaks as an event, which some of his hearers would live to see ‡. Therefore the meaning of these words of our blessed Saviour seems to be; 'I stand, indeed, at present before your tribunal like an accused malefactor, and must submit to answer your presumptuous questions; but in a short time, in this my human nature, will I sit on the throne of God, take in hand the government of my church, send down my Holy Spirit, extend my kingdom over the world, and execute on your devoted city and church, those judgments which God has long since determined. I am not ignorant, that my contemptible and abject appearance is the chief cause of your unbelief; for such an obscure condition by no means

*Psalms, civ. 3. †Isaiah, xix. 1. ‡Matt. xvi. 28.; Luke, ix. 27.

agrees with your expectations of a powerful Messiah, surrounded by all the ensigns of majesty. But you ought to consider, that the Messiah, in the writings of the prophets, is represented to you in a two-fold character; the one a state of the lowest abasement, and the other of the highest exaltation. I have hitherto conversed with you in a low, abject state; but a few hours more brings this state of abasement to a period. For when you have executed the sentence of death which you are about to pass on me, this despised Son of Man, who at present stands before you bound like a criminal, shall rise from the dead, ascend to heaven in triumph, sit on the right-hand of God, and be admitted into the participation of his unlimited power over heaven and earth. Then shall you see, feel, and experience such proofs and manifestations of my divine glory, as will force your assent to the truth.' Two particulars are here to be observed.

1. That Christ here does not call himself the Son of Man, as if the title of the Son of God did not of right belong to him in his state of abasement; on the contrary, he here directs the attention of his judge to the mystery of his person; intimating that the abased Son of Man, who now stood bound before him, was likewise the real Son of God. When Christ asked the apostle Peter, "whom do men say that I, the *Son of Man, am?*" Peter answered, "Thou art Christ the Son of the living God:"* and such the Mediator betwixt God and man must surely be. He must be man, that he may be capable of suffering; and God, in order to impart an infinite value to his sufferings: man, to humble himself to the earth; and God, to

* Matthew, xvi. 13.

raise us up to heaven: man, that he may represent mankind, and stand in their stead; and God, that he may reconcile and propitiate divine justice.

2. The Jews, who thus accused our Lord as a blasphemer, were shortly afterwards witnesses of the wonderful effects of his exaltation. They saw the many miracles which the apostles wrought in the name of Jesus, in confirmation of his resurrection.* They saw the great change effected by the preaching of the apostles in the minds and dispositions of thousands of Jews, and multitudes of heathens, who were turned from idolatry to the service of the God of Israel. They saw the Roman Legions, and Imperial Eagles, besieging and destroying their city. These were all visible effects of Christ's exaltation to the right-hand of God, and proofs of the truth of his mission, and the transcendent dignity of his person; and thus the House of Israel were taught to know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus of Nazareth, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ. —We may deduce the following inferences.

1. Obstinate infidelity is so far from being heroism, that it is the most culpable folly.

Our Saviour here expressly reproves the chief priests and scribes for not believing him to be the Messiah, after he had given sufficient proofs of it by his wonderful works, and divine miracles. Nay, he was highly offended at the unbelief of his own disciples; for on some appearance of it in two of his followers, after his resurrection, he thus reproves them; "O fools! and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."† Here Christ gives their incredulity

* Acts, v. 12. † Luke, xxiv. 25.

the appellation of folly. There is, however, a class of men among whom infidelity is considered a proof of wisdom, and who highly value themselves on their singularity in not believing as others do. They would persuade us they have a deep insight into the nature of things; and are superior to vulgar prejudices. But these free-thinkers who affect to distinguish themselves from the vulgar by infidelity, and who, without any candid inquiry after truth, reject the fundamental principles of Christianity as fit only for credulous minds, are represented by the unerring Spirit of God as mere fools: "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." *

2. When the word of God reveals to us our condition, we should beware of hardening our hearts in unbelief and self-love, lest that reproof of our blessed Saviour should be applicable to us, "If I tell you, ye will not believe."

Many when they read the word of God, experience its illuminating power on their understandings, discovering to them their condition, so that they plainly perceive they are not in that state of salvation which it describes. But how unhappy are they who close their eyes against the light of the divine word, and their ears against the testimony of unerring wisdom. Let every one, as he values the salvation of his soul, beware of this error, since it leads to hardness of heart and final impenitence; and let him reflect seriously on these words which the Holy Spirit addresses to every sinner, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." † It is a melancholy case, when the conscience is so hardened that divine

* Psalms, xiv. 1. † Hebrews, iii. 7.

truths make no impression; yet, alas! how many are there to be met with that call themselves Christians, with whom this is the case! If we discourse with them on the dangerous state of their souls, and endeavour by the strongest arguments to bring them to a sense of their sins, and by the most earnest and pressing exhortations to touch their hearts, they remain unmoved! These are certainly mortifying proofs of the depravity of the human heart; and of the power of sin in rendering men insensible to instruction, and deaf to the calls of God's word.

3. Truth ought to be confessed, though great inconveniences, and even loss of life, are expected to be the consequence. This is the pattern set by our Saviour. He was sensible of the consequences of this confession, that he would be buffeted and mocked, and that even the sentence of death would be passed on him. Nevertheless, he declares the truth. Thus he atoned for our fear of man, and that timidity which so often withholds us from confessing the truth of his religion; and he has acquired for us strength and resolution to profess his truth through life, and even to seal it with our blood.

4. We here view the dreadful consequences of rejecting the divinity and atonement of Christ. The Jews of that age refused to believe, that Christ was the Son of God; but it was foretold to them, that they should soon see and experience it: and in less than forty years, a series of calamities overtook them, exhibiting the power and dignity of the person they had despised and rejected. How terrible will be the glorious appearance of the Son of God at the last, to those who have not performed that service which he required, who have denied him in their hearts, and

refused to obey him! What have the wicked to expect from their judge, who have not only denied him the honour and worship which was his due, but given themselves up, soul and body, to the service of Satan? They will be struck with terror at the exaltation of the child of God, and cry out, "groaning for anguish of spirit: this was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach: we fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour: how is he numbered amongst the children of God, and his lot is amongst the saints!"* With what agonies will their consciences be seized, when they see the only begotten Son of God, coming in his glory, and all his holy angels with him! What dreadful emotions will this sight produce in their minds! That we may not have such a fatal experience of the glory of Christ, let us now believe in his name; thus shall we acquire the privilege of becoming the sons of God, and heirs of heaven.

5. He who is partaker with the despised Son of Man, in his abasement and sufferings, shall also partake of his glory. Whoever is not ashamed of Christ, but follows him in this perverse and adulterous generation, of him the Son of God will not be ashamed, but will own him before assembled men and angels. His glory, though terrible to his enemies, is highly consolatory to his friends and servants. They are even in this life, convinced of the infinite efficacy of his sufferings when they reflect, that Christ the anointed of the Lord, the only Son of God, has for their sake poured out his soul unto death; and that his blood cleanseth from all sin.† This consideration makes

* Wisdom, v. 3. † 1 John, i. 7.

them serene in danger, and comforts them in the hour of death. He who sitteth at the right-hand of power, who is raised to his Father's throne, to whom the clouds of heaven are a chariot, is their friend and protector: the friend of mankind, who vouchsafed to call himself their brother, will be their judge. Let us then endeavour, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to attain to a true knowledge of Jesus Christ, and a lively hope of his glory.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living God, we bless thee for giving up thy beloved Son to be judged by the wicked, that we might not come into eternal judgment, and be sentenced to everlasting death. We also praise thee, O Son of the Father, for that good confession which thou madest before this unrighteous tribunal; when thou didst acknowledge the truth of thy divine glory, and didst thereby lay the corner-stone of our faith, so that it cannot be moved. Strengthen and comfort thy true disciples and followers, in all the dangers and sufferings which they are to undergo for thy sake. Make them sensible that thou sittest at the right-hand of power, and that thy arm is not shortened to help and deliver them. Hear us, O Lord, and by thy good confession give us resolution to confess thy name before men, and to follow thee even to death. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

SENTENCE PASSED ON THE LORD JESUS AFTER HIS CONFESSION.

"Then the high-priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath "spoken blasphemy; what farther need have we of wit- "nesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy: for "we ourselves have heard of his own mouth. What think "ye? They all condemned him, and answered and said, "He is guilty of death."

In these words is related the condemnation of the Lord Jesus, which immediately followed his confession.

The charge or accusation, on which the sentence of death was grounded, is contained in these words: "Then the high-priest said, he hath spoken blasphemy." Blasphemy is a sin of the deepest die, as it is committed immediately against God. When this all-glorious Being is spoken of with contempt and mockery, and profane words are uttered against him, this is direct blasphemy. When any thing unbecoming, or absurd, is imputed to the Supreme Being, or when a man arrogates to himself what properly belongs to God, and is incommunicable to any creature, it is nothing less than indirect blasphemy. In the latter sense our Mediator, according to the perverse judgment of his enemies, had blasphemed God, in claiming to be the Son of God; consequently robbing the God of Israel of his honour, by sharing it with

him, who had expressly said, "I will not give my glory to another."* This accusation was the effect of extreme blindness and ignorance, increased by passion; so that as St. Paul says, "They knew not the Lord of glory."†

We may here observe, that the Son of God by suffering himself to be sentenced to death as a blasphemer, gave the highest proof of his love for us. By this he has expiated the sin of our first parents, and the guilt of which all their descendants are partakers. Their fall was an indirect blasphemy against the majesty of God. Man sought, by the instigation of the devil, to rob God of his honour, and to arrogate it to himself. He would fain be like God, and obtain a knowledge of good and evil, equal to that of omniscience itself. He would acknowledge no superior to prescribe laws to him, and control his freedom; but would be an independent spirit, like God himself. Thus the father and representative of mankind, and we all, with him and in him, fell under the sentence of temporal and eternal death. Now, for the atonement of that blasphemous sin, and to discharge us from the sentence of death annexed to it, the Son of God suffered himself to be sentenced, as one who would rob God of his honour, by making himself equal with God.—Blasphemy too often lurks in the human heart. Our Lord declares, "That out of the heart proceed evil thoughts and blasphemies."‡ This bitter root shoots forth in the wicked and unconverted in profane obloquy against God and his word. St. John observes, "that wicked men, being scorched with great heat, blasphemed the name of God, who had

* Isaiah, xlii. 8. † 1 Cor. ii. 8. ‡ Matt. xv. 19.

power over those plagues, and they repented not to give him the glory: they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains, and of their sores."* Hence some are of opinion, that it will be the only sin of the condemned spirits in hell to lift up their tortured tongues to all eternity against God, and blaspheme the author of their being. —From this eternal torment, the Son of God, in suffering himself to be sentenced as a blasphemer, hath delivered those who truly repent and believe on his name.—Even pious souls are sometimes surprised with blasphemous and evil thoughts, at which they themselves shudder, and on account of which they endure great trouble of mind. Satan, even whilst they are praying, reading, meditating on the word of God, or attending public worship, suggests such evil thoughts, as give them more pain than outward temptations. For the remission of both kinds of blasphemy, namely, that committed by the profane and unconverted, and those evil thoughts which intrude themselves on the children of God, Christ suffered himself to be accused of blasphemy. Through him pardon is offered to the most obstinate and profane blasphemers, if they will heartily repent and flee for refuge to Jesus their Mediator and Intercessor. With still greater assurance may they, who against their will are assaulted with blasphemous thoughts, apply to the merits of Christ; believing that in consequence of his spotless innocence, who was accused as a blasphemer, their heavenly Father will not impute to them those evil thoughts which they themselves abhor.

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* Rev. xvi. 9.

In order to render this horrid accusation more probable, and worthy of credit, the high-priest rent his clothes. This was a custom practised among the Jews, to express their extreme trouble at hearing any blasphemy against God: as Hezekiah and his servants rent their clothes at the blasphemy of Rabshakeh.* The high-priest showed by this action, that he was moved and transported with zeal at the supposed blasphemy uttered by Jesus.

He rejected all other witnesses as unnecessary and superfluous, and said, "What farther need have we of witnesses?" Why hear any further evidence, when his crimes are as clear as the sun? The court by all their false witnesses had not been able to compass their design, so that now they eagerlv seized upon our Saviour's own confession, as a short method of convicting him.

The high-priest appealed to the whole assembly, "Behold! now ye have heard his blasphemy." 'You yourselves are the most unexceptionable witnesses; this very instant we have heard blasphemy from his own mouth.'

He desired their opinion: "What think ye?" He had already by his own judgment artfully anticipated theirs, had declared Christ's confession to be blasphemy, and, in his hypocritical zeal, had rent his clothes. After having thus dictated to his colleagues and assistants how to vote, he asks their opinion; whereas had he proceeded equitably, he should first have examined whether the confession of Jesus contained any thing contrary to the writings of Moses and the prophets, or that could justly be construed

* Levit. xxi. 10.; 2 Kings, xviii. 37., xix. 1.

as blasphemy. But instead of making any farther inquiry, we find sentence of death precipitately pronounced.

"They all condemned him, and answered and said, "He is guilty of death." Here it may be objected, 'Was not Nicodemus, was not Joseph of Arimathea among the number?' How then does St. Mark affirm, that they *all* condemned him. To this it may be answered, that either these good men were not present, or were looked upon only as cyphers by the rest. This conjecture is confirmed by St. Luke; for to the honour of Joseph of Arimathea, it is said, "The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them."* And though, by his opposition, he could not avert the sentence of death from our blessed Saviour, yet is his protest entered in the book of God, and, on the day of the appearance of the Lord Jesus, will be publicly made known, to his unspeakable comfort. Moreover, we may suppose, that among the other members of the council there were not wanting some who were convinced of our Lord's innocence; and if they joined in condemning him, their compliance did not proceed from ignorance, hatred, or envy, but from the fear of man, that they might not incur the high-priest's displeasure, or be reproached as Nicodemus was, "Art thou also of Galilee?"† "Many of the chief rulers believed on him; but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him;" but concealed their sentiments; "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."‡

Christ, indeed, was unjustly condemned in a human court of judicature; but even according to the sen-

* Luke, xxiii. 51. † John, vii. 52. ‡ John, xii. 42.

tence of divine justice, he was accounted worthy of death. For he became a surety for the whole race of sinners, who had deserved to die. He took upon himself the crime of rebellion against God, committed by our first parents; permitted the guilt of it to be imputed to him at the judgment-seat; and freely offered to submit to the sentence of death, which was to be executed on blasphemers. Therefore it is here said, "He is guilty of death." The eternal Son of God, having with the consent, and according to the will of his heavenly Father, allowed our guilt to be imputed to him, and consequently our punishment to be inflicted on him, became by imputation the greatest of sinners; and in this view was worthy of this ignominious sentence. Have we ever, during the course of our lives, cordially thanked our blessed Saviour for such an unparalleled instance of his love to the human race?—We will conclude with a brief application of the subject.

1. Tremble, all ye that still serve sin; tremble at the rigour of divine justice against it, which did not pardon the beloved Son of God, when he allowed our sins to be imputed to him. Will ye still make it your delight, seeing it has drawn upon him the sentence of death? How just and reasonable then will your condemnation be at the tremendous day of judgment, if neither the rigour of divine justice has prevailed on you to forsake the practice of sin, nor the love of him, who permitted himself to be sentenced to death for you, can induce you to devote your lives to his service?

2. But as for you, who feel in your consciences the curse and sentence of death, passed on you by the law, comfort your minds with these considerations. Lift

up your eyes to the Lamb of God, the sacred victim on whom his heavenly Father imposed this sentence. Your Mediator and Surety was, according to the law, sentenced as guilty of death, and declared a malefactor, unworthy to live any longer among God's people. "The chastisement" by which your peace is effected, "was laid upon him:" and the sentence having been thus executed, *you* are for ever discharged. Believe on this Jesus who was sentenced to death; and ye "shall not come into condemnation, but shall pass from death unto life." He is now taken from prison and from judgment: he, as the Son of God, is by the resurrection acquitted and discharged from the sentence of death. As you are already sentenced in his sacred person, so are ye also acquitted and absolved with him by his resurrection. He could justly say, "Behold the Lord God will help me, who is he that shall condemn me?" So likewise may you with all boldness say, Who shall condemn me? Christ who died, or rather who is risen again,* was condemned in my stead; and "there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." †

3. You who are already in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, express your praise, love, and gratitude to your Saviour, who, out of his great love to your immortal souls, took upon himself the sentence which you had so justly deserved! Count not your lives dear for his sake, who counted not his own life too dear to be delivered up for your salvation. Enure yourselves to the imitation of your Lord and Master; and arm yourselves with his sentence against all the accusations of sin and of the law. Let the love of Christ compel

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* Romans, viii. 34. † Romans, viii. 1.

you to execute that sentence of death, which has been already passed on the old man in baptism. Account it base and dishonourable to permit this enemy of God, who for rebellion against the divine Majesty is worthy of death, to live any longer in you: manifest in yourselves the distinguishing marks of those to whom there is no longer any condemnation, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

Lastly; our Saviour in suffering himself to be sentenced to death for his declaration, that he was the Son of God, obliges us to adhere to this important truth unto death.

To this great truth, a noble army of martyrs have already witnessed with their blood. It therefore behoves us to be thoroughly convinced of, and strenuously to defend, this important article of our faith! This is particularly necessary in the present age, when Socinian principles are spreading, and obtain the sanction of many persons of learning and genius. Let us then implore God, that he will give us a steadfast faith in his Son, and strengthen us against all the power of the gates of hell. It is an unspeakable comfort to us, that Christ, by being thus condemned to die, acquired strength and boldness for so many of his faithful servants to sign this his good confession with their blood; who now are received into the presence of the adorable Son of God, who sitteth at the right-hand of the Father.

PRAYER.

Thanksgiving and praise, and honour, and glory, be ascribed to thee, O Lamb of God, who didst take upon thee the sentence under which the whole race of mankind lay, and didst suffer thyself to be cut

off out of the land of the living, that we might be delivered from the sentence of everlasting death, and be declared heirs of eternal glory. Let thy Holy Spirit discover to us the riches of this incomprehensible love. Amen.

CHAPTER X.

THE TREATMENT OF CHRIST AFTER SENTENCE WAS PASSED UPON HIM.

" Then began some to spit in his face. And the servants, " and the men who held Jesus, mocked him, smote him, and " buffeted him. And they blindfolded him, and struck " him on the face; and asked him, saying, prophesy un- " to us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee? And " many other things blasphemously spake they against " him."

THESE words exhibit to us the illegal and contumelious treatment of the blessed Jesus, after sentence had been passed on him. The members of the Sanhedrim, after having pronounced the Saviour guilty of death as a blasphemer, being prevented by fear of the people from proceeding to execute the sentence, resolved to recommend the execution of it to Pilate, the Roman governor. So much favour was not shown to the condemned Jesus, as to allow him a little rest after his fatigue and painful agony. On the contrary, he was turned over to the servants and officers of the court, who continued to insult him in the most inhuman and barbarous manner. Thus during the whole of the last night and morning of our blessed Saviour's life, his eyelids

were never closed in sleep. And as the high-priests did not use to sleep on the night preceding the great day of atonement; so the true high-priest of the New Testament, was a stranger to sleep, the night preceding the important day on which the sins of the whole human race were to be expiated. By this circumstance, our Saviour has sanctified the restless nights of his servants, when either in the pangs of repentance, or outward sufferings and afflictions, they cannot forbear crying out with the Psalmist, "thou holdest mine eyes waking."* When on any of these accounts our rest is disturbed, let us think on the sleepless hours of our blessed Lord and Saviour, on the night when he was betrayed.

As to the persons by whom our Lord was injuriously treated, it is observed, that "some began to spit on him, to cover his face, and to buffet him, and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands." "And the men that held Jesus mocked him." It is very probable, that either the chief priests themselves, or some other members of the Sanhedrim, as they went out of the hall, began this unjust treatment, and, as it were, gave the signal for it, by spitting in the face of Jesus as they passed by, and venting imprecations against him, as a blasphemer; for according to the connection of St. Matthew's account, they who had before said, "he is guilty of death," led the way in this abusive treatment. Now this was not said by the servants, but by the members of the council. If these set the example of insulting Jesus, and of giving him up to ill usage, the inferior officers of course would follow.

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* Psalms, lxxvii. 4.

That they who did not know the Lord of Glory should revile him, is not to be wondered at; but is it not astonishing, that he should often be reviled by those who acknowledged him to be the Son of God? St. Paul says of the rulers of the Jews, "that they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory, had they known him." * With much more reason may it be said of these rude, ignorant servants, they would not have insulted the blessed Jesus, had they been sensible of the adorable dignity of his person. We may with reason conclude, that in the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for these soldiers and servants, than for those wretched nominal Christians, who by their behaviour insult him whom with their lips they confess.

At the high-priest's palace the prophetic office of Jesus Christ was the mark at which these reproaches were chiefly levelled, as his regal dignity was afterwards insulted in the palace of the Roman governor.

The Messiah now experienced what is foretold in the following passages of Scripture: "I am become a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." † He was despised "by man, abhorred by the nation, a servant of rulers." ‡ He is "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." § Here the Messiah's prophetic complaint was fulfilled, "I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." ‖ Here was also fulfilled

* 1 Cor. ii. 8. † Psalms, xxii. 6. ‡ Isaiah, xlix. 7
§ Isaiah, liii. 3. ‖ Isaiah, l. 6.

what the Lord Jesus himself had foretold, namely "The Son of Man shall be mocked, and spitefully treated, and spitted on."* Hence it appears, that nothing happened on this occasion, but what God in his wise counsel had predetermined concerning the Messiah by the mouths of his holy prophets.

Let us proceed to take a separate view of the several kinds of insults offered to our Saviour.

1. "The men who held Jesus mocked him, and smote him." It is probable, that among other insults they took the blessed Jesus by the beard, and pulled it so as to tear off the skin with the hair. That this was one of the most painful and ignominious insults used by the ancients, appears from many passages in profane authors.

2. "They did spit in his face." This, both by Jews and Gentiles, has ever been accounted a mark of the utmost contempt. It sensibly grieved the patient Job, "that the children of base men did not spare to spit in his face."† What an affecting sight must it have been, to see the amiable, benign countenance of Jesus, which even angels delighted to behold, covered with loathsome spittle!

3. "They smote him with the palms of their hands, or with rods."

4. "They buffeted him, or smote him with their fists."

5. "They blindfolded him," i. e. They either covered his face, or held their hands before his eyes. Their view in this insult was, to make a pastime of the sufferings of our Saviour, by striking him, and asking who gave him the blow; for it is added,

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* Luke, xviii. 32. † Job, xxx. 10.

"They struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?" Thus they ridicule his prophetic office for which the Father had sanctified him, and sent him into the world. Our blessed Lord had been acknowledged throughout Israel as a great prophet and teacher; and but a few days before, at his entrance into Jerusalem, the people had publicly proclaimed, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth in Galilee."* They now require him to give a proof of his prophetic knowledge, by telling them, who were the particular persons that struck him while he was blindfolded.—This indignity offered to the Lord of Glory may remind us of our own depravity. What is more customary, than for the Omniscient Creator to be treated by sinful men as if he were blind, and ignorant of their doings? They vainly imagine that they can conceal their sin, and conduct it with such secrecy, that God will not know it. "Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord; and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?"†

Thanks be to thee, our Saviour and Redeemer, for suffering thy sacred face to be so reproachfully covered, that we might not be eternally clothed with shame.

6. Lastly, it is said, "And many other things blasphemously spake they against him." St. Luke seems to have been so affected with the subject, that he could not particularly enumerate all the sarcasms, invectives, and reproaches with which, in this hour of darkness, our blessed Saviour's ears were assaulted.

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* Matt. xxi. 11. † Isaiah, xxix. 15.

He therefore breaks off abruptly, and says, "Many other things blasphemously spake they against him;" which the evangelist, probably, thought not worthy to be had in remembrance. Here were tongues set on fire of hell, which like bent bows, discharged arrows of defamatory words against the Saviour.

How is a true believer humbled at the consideration of this inconceivable abasement of the Son of God! "Oh! the incomprehensible prodigy, both of divine love and human wickedness!" He himself has revealed to us the generous views, which induced him to submit to this abasement, when he says: "the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me."* Hence we learn, that the honour of his Almighty Father, to whom he was to make satisfaction, together with the greatness of our sins, required that he should be thus outraged. Praise and honour be to thee, O Lamb of God, for these proofs of thine obedience to thy heavenly Father, and thy tender love to man.

A pious soul may justly admire not only the long-suffering of the heavenly Father, who for some hours saw his beloved Son, the express image of his person, thus mocked, outraged, and beaten; but the patience of the Son, who, though he could by one word have struck these miscreants dead, yet stood like a silent lamb despising reproach and contempt; and amidst all the uproar of scoffers and revilers, remained composed and undisturbed. Notwithstanding all the injuries done him, both by words and actions, he never showed the least inclination to revenge: on the contrary, he serenely lifted up his eyes to his heavenly Father, and "committed himself unto him,

* Psalms, lxix. 7.

who judgeth righteously." How unlike are professing Christians to the pattern set them by their Lord and Master! How does a poor worm kindle into rage even at a reproachful look! It is made a point of honour to put up with no affront; and meekness, though sanctified by the example of the Son of God, is accounted mean and scandalous, so directly contrary to our Saviour's commands are many of the received maxims of the world. I lament, O my Saviour, that I have a haughty and impatient heart, and am far from imitating the pattern of thy gentleness. I feel in myself the motions of anger at the least insult. But I beseech thee, to quell these turbulent and rebellious emotions; and grant me grace that, as in all other virtues, so likewise in gentleness and meekness, I may be conformed more and more to thy image!

PRAYER.

O Eternal Wisdom, blessed be thy name for giving up thyself to the hands of sinners, that we might be freed from the cords of Satan. Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus, for all the mockeries, insults, and indignities, which thou didst endure. Cover our sins of pride and impatience with the merit of thy meekness and patience. Give us such an ardent desire of following thy example, that we may choose rather to suffer affliction for thy sake, than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. Deliver from the snares of Satan those who are yet entangled in them; discover their danger to those who still despise thy gospel, that they may flee to thy merits, and with tears of repentance seek thy righteousness. Draw every

penitent soul to thyself; and fill it with the comforts which flow from thy sufferings. Preserve, by thy grace, those who have hitherto served thee in sincerity and truth, and grant that they may remain faithful unto death. Finally, be pleased to bless the truths which have been here delivered: may they be sealed by thy Holy Spirit, so as to be to none of us a savour of death, but unto each the savour of life, to the glory of thy name, and our eternal salvation. Amen.

PART II.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST BEFORE THE CIVIL TRIBUNALS OF PILATE AND HEROD.

Narratives of the four Evangelists harmonised.

"AND the whole multitude of them arose, and "bound Jesus, and led him from Caiaphas unto the "hall of judgment, and delivered him to Pontius "Pilate the governor: And it was early in the "morning.

"Then Judas, who had betrayed him, when he "saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and "brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief "priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I "have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, "What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast "down the pieces of silver in the temple, and de-"parted, and went out and hanged himself. And "the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It "is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, be-"cause it is the price of blood. And they took "counsel, and bought with them the potter's field to "bury strangers in: wherefore that field was called "the field of blood unto this day. Then was fulfilled "that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, "saying, They took the thirty pieces of silver, the "price of him that was valued, whom they of the

" children of Israel did value, and gave them for the
" potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

" And the chief priests themselves went not into
" the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, but
" that they might eat the Passover. Pilate then went
" out unto them, and said, What accusation bring
" you against this man? They answered and said unto
" him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not
" have delivered him unto thee. Then said Pilate
" unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according
" to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him,
" It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:
" That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which
" he spake, signifying what death he should die.

" And Jesus stood before the governor. And they
" began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow
" perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute
" to Cæsar, saying, That he himself is Christ a King.
" Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again,
" and called Jesus, and asked him, saying, Art thou
" the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest
" thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee
" of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? thine own
" nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto
" me: what hast thou done?

" Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world:
" if my kingdom were of this world, then would my
" servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the
" Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.
" Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a King
" then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a
" King. To this end was I born, and for this cause
" came I into the world, that I should bear witness

" unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth
" heareth my voice.

" Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when
" he had said this, he went out unto the Jews, and
" said unto the chief priests and the people, I find
" no fault in this man. And the chief priests were
" the more fierce. And when he was accused of the
" chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then
" said Pilate unto him, Answerest thou nothing? be-
" hold, hearest thou not how many things they witness
" against thee? Jesus answered him to never a word;
" in so much that the governor marvelled greatly.

" And the chief priests said, He stirreth up the
" people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning
" from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of
" Galilee, he asked, Whether the man were a Galilean?
" And as soon as he knew that he belonged to Herod's
" jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself was
" at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw
" Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous
" to see him of a long season, because he had heard
" many things of him; and he hoped to have seen
" some miracle done by him. Then he questioned
" with him in many words; but Jesus answered him
" nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood,
" and vehemently accused him. And Herod and his
" men of war set him at nought, and mocked him;
" and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him
" again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod
" were made friends together; for before they were
" at enmity betwixt themselves.

" And Pilate, when he had called together the
" chief priests and rulers, and the people, said unto
" them, Ye have brought this man unto me as one

" that perverteth the people: and behold, I having ex-
" amined him before you, have found no fault in this
" man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him;
" no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him, and
" lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I
" will therefore chastise him, and release him. Now
" at the feast of the Passover, the governor was wont
" to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they
" would. Therefore, of necessity he must release one
" unto them at the feast. And there was one named
" Barabbas, a notable prisoner, who lay bound with
" them that had made insurrection with him; who
" had committed murder in the insurrection.

" And when they were gathered together, Pilate
" saith unto them, Ye have a custom that I should
" release unto you one at the Passover. Then the
" multitude crying aloud, began to desire him to do
" as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate an-
" swered them, saying, Whom will ye that I release
" unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?
" Will ye that I release unto you the King of the
" Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had de-
" livered him up for envy. And when he was set
" down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him,
" saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just
" man, for I have suffered many things this day in
" a dream, because of him. But the chief priests and
" elders persuaded the multitude, that they should ask
" Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. Then they cried out
" all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release
" unto us Barabbas: now Barabbas was a robber.

" Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, saith
" again to them, What will ye then that I shall do

" with Jesus who is called Christ, and whom ye call
" the King of the Jews? And they all cried out,
" Crucify him! Crucify him! And he said unto them
" the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I
" have found no cause of death in him: I will there-
" fore chastise him, and let him go. But they cried
" out the more exceedingly, Let him be crucified!
" And they were instant with loud voices, requiring
" that he might be crucified: and the voices of them
" and of the chief priests prevailed. And so Pilate,
" willing to content the people, gave sentence that it
" should be as they required. And he released unto
" them him that for sedition and murder was cast
" into prison, whom they had desired; but he de-
" livered Jesus unto their will.

" Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged
" him. And the soldiers of the governor led Jesus
" away into the common-hall, and they called together
" the whole band. And they stripped him, and clothed
" him with a purple robe. And when they had platted
" a crown of thorns, they put it about his head, and
" a reed in his right-hand; and they mocked him,
" and began to salute him, saying, Hail King of the
" Jews! And they did spit upon him, and took the
" reed and smote him on the head, and bowing the
" knee, worshipped him: and they smote him with
" their hands.

" Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto
" them, Behold I bring him forth unto you, that ye
" may know that I find no fault in him. Then came
" Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the
" purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold
" the man! When the chief priests therefore and

" officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify
" him! Crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, Take
" ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in
" him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and
" by our law he ought to die, because he made him-
" self the Son of God.

" When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he
" was the more afraid; and he went again into the
" judgment-hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art
" thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith
" Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me?
" Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify
" thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus an-
" swered, Thou couldst have no power at all against
" me, except it were given thee from above: there-
" fore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater
" sin.

" And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release
" him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let
" this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whoso-
" ever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.
" When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought
" Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment-seat,
" in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the
" Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of
" the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he
" saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they
" cried out, Away with him! Away with him! Crucify
" him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your
" King? The chief priests answered, We have no
" King but Cæsar. When Pilate saw that he could
" prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made;
" he took water, and washed his hands before the
" multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of

" this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all " the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on " our children! Then delivered he him therefore unto " them to be crucified."

PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O gracious Saviour! who art inexpressibly great and glorious, and hast been appointed by God to be the Judge of quick and dead: bless the consideration of the sufferings, which thou didst endure before the tribunal of Pilate, that our souls may be edified, and that we may become partakers of the fruits of thy sufferings, and enjoy the benefit of them both in life and death. Amen.

CHAPTER I.

CHRIST DELIVERED UP TO PILATE THE CIVIL JUDGE.

" *And the whole multitude of them arose, and bound Jesus,*
" *and led him from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment,*
" *and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor: and*
" *it was early in the morning.*"

In these words we have an account of the delivering up the Lord Jesus to Pilate, the civil judge.

Hitherto our Saviour had stood before the ecclesiastical court of the Jews. The great council had examined him at the house of Caiaphas the high-priest; had suborned false witnesses against him; and on his owning himself to be the Messiah and the

Son of God, had condemned him to die as a blasphemer; leaving him in the merciless hands of the officers and servants, who spent the time in committing insults and outrages against his sacred person. It was then, after a consultation, resolved to send him early in the morning to Pilate the civil governor, that he might be crucified after the Roman manner.

1. The persons who led our blessed Saviour away are here specified; "And the whole multitude of them arose." St. Mark informs us, they "were the chief priests, with the elders and scribes:" the most considerable persons of the Jewish nation. That these chiefs should take the trouble of delivering Jesus to Pilate with their own hands, and walking in procession with him, when other malefactors were only sent to the governor by their officers, was extraordinary: but for this method of proceeding they might have sufficient reasons. Their presence might keep the people in awe, lest any attempt should be made to rescue Jesus. Besides, they intended to move Pilate by appearing in person; and to induce him, without further inquiry, to order the execution of the sentence, pronounced by an assembly of persons eminent for their sanctity, and knowledge of the law. These were probably their motives for associating with the officers of justice and executioners, and personally conveying Jesus before the temporal judge. We may conclude that great numbers of the common people also joined this extraordinary procession.

2. We have an account of the manner of leading our blessed Lord: "When they had bound him, they led him away." He had been already bound in the garden of Gethsemanè, when he was first apprehended; and he was also sent in bonds from Annas

to Caiaphas. It is not improbable, that the Lord Jesus had been kept bound ever since he had been apprehended; but that, as he was now condemned, they bound him with stronger cords, lest he should attempt to escape, or the people should offer to rescue him by the way. If Jesus would have used his strength, he could have broken these bonds asunder, much easier than Samson did the cords with which his countrymen bound him, in order to deliver him to the Philistines. * But his love withheld his omnipotence, and made him willing to obey his Father, by submitting not only to chains, but to death; even the death of the cross.

3. Mention is here made of the place whither our blessed Saviour was led: "They led him from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment," i. e. to the palace where the Roman governor used to hold his court of judicature. This, according to some commentators, was near Antonius's castle, and for its spaciousness and elegance exceeded all other palaces in the city.

4. The person to whom the Lord Jesus is delivered is styled a governor, i. e. the person appointed by the Roman emperor to govern a province subject to the empire, in the quality of the emperor's lieutenant. This governor was to take account of the emperor's revenues, and to administer justice in criminal cases.

The name of this governor or vicegerent was Pontius Pilate. This person was sent to Judea to be governor of that province of the Roman empire in the thirteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, and was the fifth in succession of those who had been invested with this dignity. He bears a character in history

* Judges, xv. 13.

of injustice, avarice, and cruelty: and amongst other crimes, is charged with receiving bribes, and even with having put to death several innocent persons without any previous trial. If, in our blessed Saviour's case, he made a show of equity and regard to justice, and not only gave our Lord a full hearing, but for some time stood out against the unjust clamours of the great council of the Jews; this must be attributed to the hand of God, which for a while restrained this man, who had ordered the execution of so many persons without any inquiry into their case. Thus the innocence of Jesus was rendered manifest at his tribunal; a manifestation in which the whole race of mankind was so nearly concerned.

But here it may it be proper to inquire, What could move the Jewish Sanhedrim, which at other times had such an aversion to the Roman governor, to deliver up Jesus to Pontius Pilate? and why they did not themselves put in execution the sentence they had passed on Jesus, as they did afterwards in the case of St. Stephen the protomartyr? *

The first and principal cause of this uncommon procedure was unquestionably their extreme malice and hatred against the Lord Jesus. They thought all the capital punishments used among the Jews were too mild and favourable for such an execrable malefactor. They chose therefore that he should die by a painful and ignominious crucifixion: and that consequently he might be rendered an object of abhorrence to all the Jewish people, then present at the feast of the Passover; so that no one might here-

* Acts, vii. 59.

after venture to profess a belief in Jesus, or speak favourably of him or his doctrine.

Another motive to this action was their fear of the populace. Of this apprehension they had, the day before, given a sufficient intimation, by saying, "Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar amongst the people." * They justly concluded, that if any tumult should happen, the garrison would interfere.—By proceeding before Pilate they would also be better able to justify themselves to the people, and to throw the blame on the Roman governor.

But the over-ruling cause of this transaction was the wise decree of God; for St. Peter informs us, that Jesus was delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God into wicked hands, which crucified him. † God was pleased to permit what now happened;

1. That the types and prophecies expressive of this circumstance of our Saviour's passion might be fulfilled. Hereby were to be accomplished the type exhibited by Joseph, whom his invidious brethren sold to foreigners; ‡ the type of Samson who was delivered up by his own people to the uncircumcised Philistines; § and the type of Jonah, who was thrown out of the ship, and given up to the raging waves of the sea. ‖ Not only the types, but also several prophecies of the Old Testament were hereby fulfilled. Here Jews and Gentiles conspired against Christ the anointed of the Lord. ** Here was fulfilled what our blessed Lord had some time before declared to his disciples in these words: "The Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the

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* Matt, xxvi. 5. † Acts, ii. 23. ‡ Gen. xxxvii. 28.
§ Judges, xv. 12. ‖ Jonah, i. 15. ** Psalms, ii. 1.; Acts, iv. 25.

chief priests and scribes, and they shall deliver him up to the Gentiles." *

2. That the innocence of our Lord and Saviour might be rendered more conspicuous. Had he been immediately dragged out of the Sanhedrim, and tumultuously stoned, his innocence might not have appeared in so clear a light.

3. That the measure of our Saviour's sufferings might be completely filled up. Had Jesus been immediately stoned as a blasphemer, his sufferings would have been short: but being crucified after the Roman manner, his death was preceded by a painful scourging, and a series of indignities and insults. Besides, this kind of death was of such a nature, that the blood of Christ, appointed as a ransom for our sins, was profusely shed; which could not have properly happened by any punishment usually inflicted by the Jews.

Lastly, The Lord Jesus was delivered up to the Gentiles, that by this a foundation might be laid for the salvation of all people, and that Jews and heathens might be made partakers of the merits acquired by his sufferings. He was to be the "propitiation for the sins of the whole world." † To render this glorious truth more worthy of belief, God was pleased to permit both Jews and Gentiles to be stained with his blood, and the heathens to put the finishing hand to those sufferings which the Jews had already begun to inflict. The high-priest was the chief of the Jewish nation; and Pilate was representative of the Roman emperor, the supreme head of the world at that time,

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* Matt. xx. 18. † John, ii. 2

The blessed Jesus being condemned both by the spiritual court of the Jews, and the civil tribunal of the heathen governor, both Jews and Gentiles were guilty of his blood; and as they were equally guilty, they may alike seek, and be entitled to pardoning grace.

The above text informs us of the time when the Lord Jesus was delivered up. St. John observes that it was early, i. e. about six of the clock in the morning, according to our division of the day. In such haste were these blood-thirsty men! Early in the morning, when they ought to have been at their devotions, or in the temple, preparing for the celebration of the Passover, they are occupied with blood-shed and murder. The prophet Zephaniah appears to have in view the judges of the Messiah in these words, "They rose early, and corrupted all their doings." * Such was the impatience of this multitude, that they would not allow the blessed Jesus an interval to prepare for death; an indulgence usually granted malefactors. This precipitancy was probably likewise an effect of their cunning; being intended to anticipate the assembling of the people in a tumultuous manner, or the intervening of other affairs which might divert Pilate from putting the sentence in execution.—We may draw the following inferences:

1. The Holy One, by permitting himself to be delivered up to the hands of the uncircumcised, has taken away the reproach of our spiritual uncircumcision, and gained for us Gentiles a right to be denizens of Israel. To die by the hands of the uncircumcised was, in the Old Testament, accounted an accursed

* Zephaniah, iii. 7.

death.* Accordingly Samson makes this bitter complaint: "Lord, thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant; and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?"† Nay, King Saul chose rather to fall by his own sword, than to be taken prisoner and insulted by the uncircumcised.‡ Here the most sacred and glorious person who ever appeared on earth, suffers himself to be delivered into the hands of the uncircumcised, in order thereby to atone for the uncircumcision of our hearts, and to acquire for us Gentiles a participation in the privileges of the people of God, and admission into that covenant of grace, of which circumcision was once the seal.

2. It is no new thing for the seat of judgment to be made an engine of injustice, through the corruption of human nature. This is not an abuse of modern date, but existed so early as the time of Solomon; "Moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there."§ This melancholy circumstance, should by no means prompt us to deny the existence of a Providence: on the contrary, we should console ourselves by reflecting, that the Son of God, the supreme Judge of quick and dead, was made to feel in his sacred person the effects of injustice; and by those means prepared the way for his followers, that they should not stumble at this rock of offence. A day of judgment will come, when every act of injustice will receive its due reward. To this Solomon alludes in the passage above quoted,

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* Ezek. xxxii. 19. † Judges, xv. 18. ‡ 1 Sam. xxxi. 4.
§ Eccles. iii. 16.

where he adds, "Then I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time for every purpose."*

PRAYER.

O holy and most merciful God! Make us, we beseech thee, partakers of all the benefits purchased by the sufferings of thy dear Son. Excite us to a sincere and effectual repentance: let none of us put off his conversion; but grant that those who are yet in the morning of their lives, instead of wasting their youth and strength in the service of Satan, may be roused from their lethargy, and come to him who alone can wash away their sins. Grant also, that those who have already devoted themselves to thy service, may find their souls refreshed with new light and comfort, for the sake of thine infinite mercy. Amen.

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* Eccles. iii. 17.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESPAIR OF THE TRAITOR JUDAS.

" *Then Judas, who had betrayed him, when he saw that he*
" *was condemned, repented himself, and brought again*
" *the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*
" *saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the inno-*
" *cent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See*
" *thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in*
" *the temple, and departed, and went out and hanged him-*
" *self. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and*
" *said, It is not lawful for to put them in the treasury,*
" *because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel,*
" *and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers*
" *in: wherefore that field was called the field of blood*
" *unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was*
" *spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, They took the*
" *thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued,*
" *whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave*
" *them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*"

St. Matthew here makes a digression to inform us of what happened to Judas, the betrayer of our blessed Lord. As he was one of the chief instruments which Satan made use of to promote the sufferings of Christ, the whole church was concerned to know what became of this " son of perdition." The evangelist therefore gives us a particular account of his end as a warning to those who against conscience and the clearest conviction, oppose Him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world.

We have here related what happened previous to the catastrophe, with regard both to the traitor himself, and also to those who had bribed him to betray his Master.

As to the traitor, he was seized with remorse: "Then Judas who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself." Hitherto Judas had probably flattered himself, that Jesus would have escaped, for he had frequently seen him pass unhurt through crowds of his enemies, and by that means disappoint their rage. St. Luke tells us, that the Nazarenes "thrust him out of their city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon the city was built, that they might cast him down headlong; but he, passing through the midst of them, went his way."* And St. John informs us, that at Jerusalem, "the Jews took up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself,† and went out of the temple, through the midst of them, and so passed by."‡ This our blessed Lord did, because his appointed hour of suffering was not yet come. On these circumstances Judas probably built the vain hope, that Jesus would again set himself at liberty, and break the bonds of his enemies; and in the mean time, that he might safely keep the thirty pieces of silver, and apply them to his own use.

But now the traitor was convinced too late, that he had been mistaken. He saw that his Master was condemned to die by the Jewish spiritual judicature, and

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* Luke, iv. 29.

† The text says, Ἰησους ἐκρυβη, i. e. Jesus was hid; probably became invisible; and so passed through the midst of his enemies.

‡ John, viii. 59.

that they were going to deliver him up to the civil power. Upon this, his obdurate heart began to relent. His conscience, which had been long insensible, began to awake, and represented to him the heinousness of his crime. The innocence of the blessed Jesus, the innumerable kindnesses which he had received from him, the timely admonitions given him against this base ingratitude, the approaching ignominious death which he foresaw his Master was to suffer, the contempt and detestation in which he would be held as the betrayer of his Master, and the everlasting punishment which would be the consequence of his treachery, presented themselves to his distracted mind. He now wished, but in vain, that he had never engaged in this horrid plot; and, if it had not been already carried on too far to be recalled, he would fain have prevented it. That this remorse of Judas was a painful and heartfelt sensation, an insupportable reflection on what he had done, proceeding from an awakened conscience, appears from the signs by which it displayed itself.

First, He made a sincere confession of his crime. He went to the chief priests and elders of the people, probably whilst they were yet in Caiaphas's palace, preparing to conduct our Lord to the tribunal of Pilate. He acknowledged with grief and sorrow, that he had acted a perfidious part: "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Thus he confessed his own guilt, and his Master's spotless innocence. By this confession, he openly arraigned the judgment of the Sanhedrim, and their sentence on our blessed Lord. Probably, he entertained the vain hope that the chief priests and elders would relent, and revoke the sentence.

Secondly, After this confession, he returned the bribe which he had received: "He brought again the thirty pieces of silver." This money, which before had given him so much joy, was now an insupportable burden to his conscience. He could not bear to keep it; and would have been happy, if on his returning to them the pieces of silver, they would have restored liberty to his Master. Nay, when they refused to receive the money, Judas hurried to the temple, cast down the pieces of silver near the treasury, and there left them. Thus impatient was the traitor to get rid of the price of innocent blood, hoping by that means to ease his burdened conscience. These are the signs by which Judas evidenced the reality of his remorse. How inconsiderable are the signs of repentance, even in many who call themselves Christians, when compared with these! How deficient are they in a thorough conviction of their sins, and a candid confession of them! They, indeed, have little difficulty in acknowledging in general terms, that they are sinners; but to own themselves guilty of this or that particular offence, though notoriously practised by them, is what their proud spirits will not submit to. They are very ingenious in excusing or covering their sins under the softer name of foibles, and they show no heartfelt sorrow, no real hatred of sin. Such persons may join in using the language of confession in the prayers of the Church, but their hearts flatly contradict their professions, and remain unhumbled. Their consciences continue to slumber. Instead of resolving to restore ill-gotten wealth, they persevere in a course of extortion, and injustice; and go on adding sin to sin.

But some may object, If Judas was so sincere a

penitent, why was not mercy shown to him? Peter, who with horrid oaths and imprecations, had denied Jesus, obtained forgiveness: whereas the unhappy Judas is given up to such insupportable despair, that he puts an end to his life. What other signs could have been required of him, to demonstrate the sincerity of his remorse?—On a more attentive consideration of Judas's sorrow, we shall observe several imperfections, to which the rejection of his repentance may be reasonably imputed.

1. His acknowledgment of his sin was defective. He, indeed, made a declaration of his sin before men; but we do not read of any confession to God; though it was that all-perfect Being whom he had chiefly offended.

2. His trouble proceeded from a wrong cause. It was not so much his crime that troubled him, as the unfortunate consequences of it. Had Jesus extricated himself from the hands of his enemies, it is probable that Judas would have enjoyed the reward of his perfidy without remorse.

3. His returning the bribe, the infamous price of blood, seems to have proceeded not from any honest disdain or abhorrence of this reward of iniquity, but from self-love, and a desire of easing his oppressed conscience. Thus a master of a ship throws his cargo over-board in a violent storm; but he does it with great reluctance, and only with a view to save himself.

4. It does not appear that Judas sincerely humbled himself under the hand of God. Instead of considering the reproofs of his awakened conscience as the just punishment of his villany, and submitting to its corrections, he impatiently deprives himself of that

existence for which he was accountable to the author of it.

5. In this account of the traitor's sorrow, we read nothing of prayer, without which repentance can never attain to maturity.

Lastly, His repentance was destitute of a pious confidence in the mercy of God; which would have taught him that for the sake of the Messiah, he, though a notorious sinner, might have obtained mercy and forgiveness. On the contrary, his gloomy mind abandoned all hope of mercy. These were the principal defects in Judas's repentance, to which the rejection of it may be attributed.

The chief priests and scribes were infected with the most relentless insensibility, when Judas applied to them. When he formerly had waited on them with his offer of delivering Jesus into their hands, they no doubt received him graciously; but now, having attained their object, they despise him, and are so far from endeavouring to console him under his trouble, that they treat him with a supercilious haughtiness. This barbarous insensibility appears in their shifting off the fault from themselves, "What is that to us?" 'We have authority to condemn Jesus of Nazareth as a blasphemer: if thou art of so scrupulous a conscience, as to be troubled for having delivered him into our hands, it is no concern to us.' This was not unlike the impious speech of Cain, who said with equal unconcern, "Am I my brother's keeper?" *

They also lay the whole blame on Judas in these words, "See *thou* to that." 'If you have committed

* Gen. iv. 9.

a fault, in delivering up this man, you must take the consequences.' Miserable comforters indeed! they here display an obdurate heart, in their inhumanity towards a member of their own church; one whom they themselves had bribed to commit a heinous crime, and whom, on that account, they now saw in the agonies of despair. Unfaithful pastors! careless shepherds, who had no concern for a lost sheep! Yet this was a just punishment on Judas for the hardness of his heart. He would not hear the voice of the good Shepherd, nor profit by his gracious admonitions. He now falls into the hands of inhuman guides and false shepherds; who are so far from binding up his wounds, that they treat him with exasperating contempt and disdain.

As to the sad catastrophe of Judas, St. Matthew thus relates it: "He departed, and went out, or went away," (to seek a convenient place, where, he might put an end to the tortures of his conscience) "and hanged himself."

St. Luke informs us in the Acts of the Apostles, that "falling headlong, or rather prone, he burst out in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem." * Hence it may seem that having hanged himself on the brow of a hill in some retired place, and the halter breaking by the force with which he threw himself off, he fell down the precipice, and burst asunder with the force of the fall, so that he lay expiring in a most painful and terrible manner, a spectacle of horror to all that beheld him.

The traitor Judas may be considered both as a wit-

* Acts, i. 18.

ness of the innocence of Jesus Christ, and as an unhappy instance of a deluded and wretched sinner.

First, Judas is to be considered as a witness of the innocence of our Saviour: for his awakened conscience extorted from him this acknowledgment, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." This testimony of Christ's innocence deserves the greater credit, as it proceeds from one of his enemies, who does not speak out of favour to our Lord; but condemns his own perfidy, at the same time that he acquits the blessed Jesus from all fault, and acknowledges his innocence: and further, as it comes from one who, as he was a disciple, had an opportunity of being daily with his Master for above three years, and consequently was witness of all his discourses and most secret transactions. Had Judas not made this confession, an opposer of the cross of Christ might have thus argued: 'who knows, but the man might be urged by his own conscience, to discover the mystery of iniquity, hitherto concealed in the school of Jesus of Nazareth? Possibly he might have discovered, in his private conversations with his Master, many secret crimes and pernicious designs, which were not known to the generality of the Jewish people; and found himself compelled to report them to the high-priests and elders.' But this open confession of his Master's innocence, and his own guilt, at once obviates all such unjust suspicions. Had he been privy to any criminal proceedings, any thing worthy of punishment committed by Jesus or his disciples, he would, without doubt, have made it known to the world when he saw Jesus sentenced to die, in order to excuse his treachery in the eyes of

men. But he was so thoroughly convinced of the perfect innocence and sanctity of Jesus Christ, that he makes an open voluntary acknowledgment of his own guilt, and his Master's innocence. We may here observe,

1. That it is a wonderful instance of the wisdom of God, so to order contingencies, that the betrayer of our blessed Saviour should give a public and unsuspected testimony to his innocence. Thus from the evil which he committed, good accrues to mankind. This method of deriving good from evil, is often manifested in the divine proceedings. Hence we may form some idea of the motive which induced our Lord to admit into the number of his twelve disciples, a man, whose treachery he foresaw; and to give him an opportunity of being daily with him, and privy to all his proceedings; for thus his subsequent testimony of Christ's innocence carried with it the greater force. Let every one, in surveying his own life, and the lives of others, observe how frequently God, in his infinite wisdom, hath caused good to proceed out of evil. But let no one from this consideration, think it lawful to do evil that good may come: of such, St. Paul declares their condemnation to be just. *

2. A speculative conviction of the innocence of the suffering Jesus, is not sufficient to shield us from the wrath of God, and the sentence of condemnation due to sin. What did it avail the wretched Judas that he was convinced of Christ's innocence, when he did not believe on him, whose innocence he so publicly acknowledged? What will it avail us, that in our prayers we daily invoke the name of Christ, if

* Rom. iii. 8.

we do not properly apply the merit of his innocence?

Now, in order to reap the salutary effects of the innocence of Christ, we must, with deep repentance, acknowledge our original depravity, and our actual transgressions. We must consider, how God has imputed all our guilt to the blessed Jesus, our surety, and laid on him the iniquity of us all;* as the trespasses of sinners under the Mosaic dispensation were laid on the victims destined for sacrifice. We must with humble faith apply to our Mediator, to sprinkle our hearts from an evil conscience, praying for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to make us righteous and holy in our hearts and lives.

Secondly, Judas may be considered as an unhappy instance of a deluded and wretched sinner. He lost his character and reputation; he lost his possessions and life; his body and soul. He reaped not the least advantage or delight from this heinous sin. The thirty pieces of silver, which he received as the reward of his perfidy, his conscience compelled him to refund; so that he experienced nothing but trouble, anguish, and remorse. He was tormented by his own conscience; and was forsaken by those who should have comforted him. We observe here,

1. That a sinner does not attain at once to extreme lengths of wickedness. God shows all patience and long-suffering even towards the vessels of wrath who are preparing themselves for destruction, and checks them in their progress. The treachery of Judas was not his first crime. We first observe in him a hankering desire after unjust gain and illicit profits,

* Isaiah, liii. 6.

which his office gave him an opportunity of indulging; he being the purse-bearer, who received and paid money on account of his Master and fellow-disciples. His insatiable desire of riches would not permit him to forego any opportunity of acquiring wealth, and at length seduced him into theft. As Judas was insensible to the admonitions of Christ,* and palliated his covetousness under pretence of a care for the poor,† he fell into a state of obduracy, and became lost to all sense of shame. He still associated with the other apostles; nay, he ate the paschal lamb with Jesus and the disciples, and suffered his feet to be washed by his Master. But when our Lord revealed to the other disciples the evil purposes of Judas's heart, and detected his villany, he abruptly quitted the company. Satan entered into him, blinded his mind, and prompted him to put his malignant design in execution. No sooner was the crime perpetrated, than he fell into a state of despair, and plunged into eternal perdition. Thus agreeably to the words of St. James, "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."‡ O that, from the example of Judas, we may learn the danger of the least transgression! O that every one of us may be on his guard against the stratagems of the devil, who thus insensibly leads the soul step by step to destruction! O that they, who are inclined to covetousness, may seriously reflect to what enormities this vice may seduce them, even to the making shipwreck of salvation.

2. It is the artifice of the devil to suggest to the sinner, that the meditated sin is only a trifle, and the mercy of God inexhaustible; but when the sin

* John, vi. 70.; xiii. 18. † John, xii. 5. ‡ James, i. 15.

is committed, the tempter presents it to the sinner's conscience in most dreadful colours. This the unhappy Judas experienced. To betray Christ, at first seemed to him but a slight fault; and he hoped that his Master would forgive him. But Satan, having seduced him into sin, represents his conduct in a different light. The sin, which before seemed a trifle, now oppresses his conscience with an insupportable load. The mercy of Christ, which he before thought to be without bounds, is forgotten; and he no longer entertains any hopes of forgiveness. Thus it is with the careless and secure. Satan first allures them with a hope of God's mercy, and induces them presumptuously to sin, in expectation of pardon and forgiveness; but after the sin is committed, he fills them with terror, representing to their consciences the divine justice, and those dreadful threatenings which God has denounced against sinners. Happy are they who maintain such a sense of the justice and holiness of God, as deters them from sin; and those who, if they have sinned already, preserve such a view of his infinite mercy, as may keep them from falling into despair!

3. A sinner may proceed far in the work of repentance, and yet come short of salvation. The traitor discovered several marks of contrition; but his heart remained unconverted. He was intent on assuaging the pangs of his conscience; not solicitous to be absolved of his guilt. Let those sinners, whose consciences have been awakened from a state of security, take warning from this example; and give themselves no rest, until they are truly humbled before God; until they are passed from the law to the gospel. Let

them hasten to the fountain freely opened for sin and uncleanness; and seek not so much to appease their wounded conscience, as to be delivered from that guilt which oppresses and disturbs it.

4. A person may be possessed of extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, as well as great natural endowments, and yet be a child of perdition. Judas unquestionably was not without his peculiar talents. The blessed Jesus, who had chosen him for the work of an apostle, undoubtedly imparted to him the qualities necessary for the discharge of that high office. Yet he went, as the scripture informs us, "to his own place." Therefore, let no one trust to his natural endowments or splendid gifts, but endeavour that his heart may be sanctified by grace; otherwise, while he preaches to others, he himself may be a castaway.

5. The horrid inclination to suicide, with which some gloomy minds are tempted, must be opposed by diligence in duty, by prayer and watchfulness, and the word of God. Had the unhappy Judas armed himself with these spiritual weapons, he had not fallen into so fatal a snare of the devil. Let his example render us cautious; and as we have seen that the greater the former security of an impenitent sinner, the more insupportable is his despair when his conscience is awakened, let us beware of being lulled into a state of false security. It may not indeed always happen, that actual despair follows a state of false security; many thousands die tranquil and easy, in the presumptuous reliance on God's mercy: but their horror and disappointment will be the greater and more intolerable when they awake in a miserable eternity. It therefore behoves us to be on our guard

against the opposite extremes of mistaken confidence and hopeless despondency.

6. Covetousness, and an inordinate love of the things of this world, are often the causes of bitter disappointment. "The love of money is the root of all evil," which draws men into temptations and snares; and finally drowns them in destruction and perdition.* When a man withdraws his heart from God, and fixes his affections on temporal things, if he is afterwards deprived of these by any of the vicissitudes of life, he cries out with Micah, "Ye have taken away my Gods, and what have I more?" Let us, if we would not make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, avoid covetousness, and an overweening attachment to the world.

After the death of Judas, the chief priests and scribes consulted together how to dispose of the money which he had cast down in the temple: "The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood." Thus they abhor the fact, which they themselves had caused to be perpetrated by bribing Judas with this money. They then agreed that it should be laid out on some charitable foundation, and accordingly purchased with it a field, which they appropriated as a burying-place for pilgrims or foreign Jews, who should happen to die at Jerusalem. For as every Jew in that city had his particular burying-place for himself and his family, great difficulties often arose about interring in these private cemeteries the bodies of foreign Jews who happened to die at Jerusalem; they therefore bar-

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*1 Tim. vi. 9.

gained with a potter, who parted with his field for the purpose at so low a rate as thirty pieces of silver. "They took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in."

St. Matthew, in his account of the above transaction, has observed, that the counsel of God overruled the Jewish council in this circumstance. It was displayed,

First, In the name of the field, by which the memory of this impious action of the chief priests and elders was transmitted to posterity. For it was called the field of blood, in commemoration of its being purchased with the price of blood. This name given to it could not but displease the chief priests and elders, who would rather have had the remembrance of their crime buried in oblivion, had it been in their power. This foundation for the benefit of strangers, was perhaps intended by them to transmit their names with honour to posterity; but God directed that a name of infamy should be indelibly fixed on the purchase.

Secondly, The counsel of God manifested itself more particularly in the accomplishment of an ancient prophecy, to which St. Matthew refers, when he adds, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by [Jeremy] the prophet, saying, They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." These words occur in the prophecy of Zechariah, * where they are connected with the prediction concerning the selling of the Messiah for thirty silver pieces. This

* Zech. xi. 13.

prophecy is by the evangelist attributed to the prophet Jeremy, perhaps because he was reckoned the first among the prophets, and on that account all the writings of the prophets collectively were called by his name; or because this prophecy had been delivered down by oral tradition from Jeremiah, like that of Enoch quoted by St. Jude,* until at length it was recorded in the canonical writings by the prophet Zechariah.† From the accomplishment of the prophecy it is evident, that the circumstances of this transaction happened according to the pre-determined counsel and will of God, long before declared.

PRAYER.

Praised be thy name, O gracious God, who, in thy holy word, hast caused to be set before us many examples, by which we may learn to avoid those fatal rocks on which others have made shipwreck of their salvation. May the example of the betrayer make a deep impression on our souls. Preserve us from presumptuous sins; and when, through the temptations of Satan, and the solicitations of our flesh, we stumble and fall, keep us from filling up the measure of our transgressions, by heaping sin upon sin, or despairing of that mercy which thou hast promised to sinners. May the contemplation of the sufferings of thy dear Son, create in us that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not be repented of. And

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* Jude, 14.

"† Many learned men, on very probable grounds, are of opinion, "that no name was originally in the text,—'Then was fulfilled that "which was spoken *by the prophet*, saying, &c.'

(Scott's Commentary on Zech. xi.—See Doddridge's Family Expositor.)

when we see and feel the heinousness of our sins, and hear the clamours of conscience, may we flee to the righteousness of our great High Priest for refuge! Amen.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST CONFERENCE BETWEEN PILATE AND THE ACCUSERS OF THE LORD JESUS.

"*And the chief priests themselves went not into the judg-*
"*ment-hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they*
"*might eat the Passover. Pilate then went out unto*
"*them, and said, What accusation bring ye against*
"*this man? They answered and said unto him, If he*
"*were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered*
"*him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them, Take*
"*ye him, and judge him according to your law. The*
"*Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us*
"*to put any man to death: that the saying of Jesus*
"*might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what*
"*death he should die.*"

THE Holy Spirit seems to have been particularly careful, that this part of the history of our Saviour's passion should be accurately and circumstantially related by the four evangelists, that it might refute the false and spurious accounts of this transaction afterwards dispersed both among the Jews and Gentiles. The emperor Maximinus, from an inveterate rancour against the person and religion of Christ, ordered a book to be expressly written under the title

of the *Acts of Pilate.* This spurious account was filled with the most impious blasphemies against our blessed Lord; and the emperor caused several copies of the book to be transcribed, and dispersed through the Roman empire, and directed it to be introduced into the schools of the Christians, that their children, learning it by heart, might be early prejudiced against the doctrines of Christ.

We shall, in the first place, consider what is related previous to this conference, both as to the Jews and Pilate.

Concerning the Jews, it is said, "They themselves went not into the judgment-hall. The chief priests, scribes, and elders, having brought Jesus to Pilate's house, where he used to hold his court of judicature, remained without, and requested Pilate to come out, in order to hear their charge against Jesus.

St. John mentions their reasons for this behaviour. The first is, that they might not be defiled. The Jews, by their ceremonial law, were liable to numberless defilements. They were defiled by going into an unclean house; by touching a dead body, and by many other circumstances which Moses particularly enumerates in the book of Leviticus.* Yet it does not appear from the Mosaic law, that they would have defiled themselves by going into the house of a heathen. This was probably one of those traditional rites enjoined by the scribes and pharisees, in the observance of which, many were more punctual than in their obedience to the express commands of God himself. Thus when Peter went into the house of Cornelius, a pagan officer, those Christians who still

* Lev. xi. to xv.

adhered to the Jewish traditions reproached him with it, saying, "thou wentest in to men uncircumcised." * This institution of the scribes and elders originated partly in their detestation of the idolatry, and partly in their extreme contempt for the Gentiles. And as the law enjoined that pollutions were particularly to be avoided at the feast of the Passover, † they had this additional motive for not entering the judgment-hall, namely, that they were to eat the Passover. They had indeed, eaten the paschal lamb the evening before, at the time when Jesus was celebrating that institution with his disciples; so that by the Passover here is understood, not the paschal lamb, but the paschal sacrifices, which were offered during the seven days of that festival. ‡ It was now the first day of the feast, on which the Jews used to kill a great number of sheep and oxen; parts of the victims being laid on the altar as a burnt-offering, and the remainder eaten in the courts of the temple. § But no unclean person was to eat either of the paschal lamb, or of the flesh of the paschal offering. ‖ They therefore pretend that their tender consciences will not permit their entering Pilate's house, and send a request, that he would confer with them at the door, as being the utmost their law allowed of at such a period.

"Then Pilate went out unto them." Had this heathen governor been inclined to maintain his dignity, and to adhere to ceremonial, he might have dismissed them with a reproof; particularly as the high-priest could not have produced any divine law which prohibited his going into the house of a heathen

* Acts, xi. 3. † Numbers, ix. 6. ‡ Deut. xvi. 2, 3.
§ Numbers, xxviii. 16. ‖ Levit. xxii. 4.

judge. But here he acted like a prudent and cautious politician; conforming to this usage of the Jews, that he might not provoke them by insisting on a punctilio, which might render them his enemies: for he well knew, that this superstitious people would rather die, than deviate in the least tittle from their ceremonies and traditions. We observe,

1. That it is the usual practice of hypocrites to pay a greater regard to human traditions, than to the revealed law of God. The commandments of God are: "Thou shalt not kill." "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." "The innocent and righteous slay thou not."* But these divine commands, the enemies of Christ here slight and transgress; while they pretend conscientiously to observe the injunctions of their forefathers, which declared that to go into the house of a heathen, polluted them and rendered them unfit for the celebration of the Passover. The divine law, which enjoined that no unclean person should eat of the paschal lamb, or the paschal offering, was intended to denote, that no person can have fellowship with the unclean and unfruitful works of darkness. These hypocrites throw away the substance of the divine law, and grasp at the shadow. They abhor the pollution of the Gentiles; and yet make use of their assistance to condemn the innocent blood. Their care to keep themselves from outward defilement extended even beyond the bounds which God required; but they were strangers to purity of heart and conscience, as was evident from their unjust and blood-thirsty designs. Thus our Lord justly upbraided them with laying aside the com-

* Exod. xxiii. 7.

mandments of God, and holding the traditions of men.* This is still the usual practice of hypocrites, and particularly prevails in the church of Rome, in which Christianity is, as it were, overwhelmed by a deluge of human ordinances, and the decrees of the Pope are more implicitly obeyed than the commandments of God.

2. When Christ and his members are to be oppressed, Satan easily persuades men of the world to forego all the respect due to their rank and character, which, at other times, they so strenuously insist on. In the instance before us, Pilate, the Roman governor, deigns to comply with the desire of the Jews: he condescends to come out of his palace, to confer with them, and hear their complaint in the court before his door. The chief priests and elders also forget their high rank and dignity, and mix with the meanest of the people. All disputes about precedency are set aside; and every thing is transacted without ceremony. Such an union as this, the *hatred* of Christ often brings about amongst bad men. Should not, then, the *love* of Christ, move his people to deny their own ease and honour; to merge their petty differences, and unite in promoting his cause and advancing his kingdom?

We come, in the next place, to consider the conference between the Jews and Pontius Pilate.

First, "Pilate said, What accusation bring ye against this man?" The members of the Sanhedrim, having come in person to deliver up the prisoner to Pilate, he could not but look on them as plaintiffs or accusers; and therefore would know the ground

* Mark, vii. 8.

of their charge. This had a favourable appearance, and afforded some hopes that Pilate would proceed equitably and conscientiously in the trial. But it is well known from history, that he had unjustly put many persons to death without a hearing; so that this question might proceed from a mere formal compliance with the Roman law. For, as Festus, another Roman governor, observed, It was not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he who was accused had the accusers face to face, and had licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.* In this proceeding of Pilate, we are likewise to look to an over-ruling providence, which influenced this unjust judge to demand a proof of the accusation, that the innocence of the blessed Jesus might be fully displayed; and that the world might be convinced it was not for his own sins, but for the sins of others that Christ suffered.

2. To this question of Pilate, the Jews made a rude answer: "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." They were offended, that the Roman governor should presume to ask them on what account they would have Jesus of Nazareth crucified, since this implied a suspicion of their impartiality and justice. They therefore expostulated with Pilate: as if they had said, 'Do you not know that the Roman emperors have left us the privilege of taking cognizance of crimes committed against our law, and of passing sentence on the criminals? We are not obliged to give you, who are a heathen, the reasons of our judicial proceedings.

* Acts, xxv. 16.

It is our business to try causes, and your part to put our sentences in execution, without questioning their legality. This is an infringement of our privileges.' Thus they oppose their privilege to the power of the civil judge, hoping that Pilate, intimidated by their resolute behaviour, would, without further inquiry, in deference to their judgment, give orders for the immediate execution of the prisoner.

3. In the next place, we observe Pilate's reply. "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law." Pilate saw through their crafty designs, and that they wished him to proceed contrary both to the Roman law, and to justice and equity. He was offended at their wishing to make him their tool, blindly to ratify the unjust proceedings they had carried on; and therefore he retorts, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law."—'If you *have* a law, by which a man may be sentenced to die, and executed, without a trial, judge your malefactor according to it. We, Romans, have other laws, more agreeable to equity. If you think me not worthy to be informed of the reason of your passing sentence of death on this man, (since, possibly, you are conscious it will not bear examination,) I will not become your tool, to put in execution your illegal sentences. Execute what you have decided, at your own peril; I declare against having any concern in the matter.'

4. The Jews make an evasive answer, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." There is a dispute concerning the import of these words of the Jewish priests and elders; namely, whether the Jews were at that time totally deprived of the privilege of trying capital cases, or whether they still

retained it with certain limitations. This controversy we shall wave; observing however, that there are examples of the Jews having delivered up persons to death, after our Saviour's crucifixion; as St. Stephen and St. James, who were beheaded by the order of Herod, king of the Jews. It is probable, that the power of punishing capitally such crimes as concerned the Jewish nation, and against which their law denounced death, had not been wholly taken away, but was enjoyed with many exceptions; and that those crimes by which the tranquillity of the commonwealth was endangered, coming more directly under the cognizance of the civil power, were therefore punished by the Roman governor, according to the laws of the empire. The Jews might have an eye to this circumstance when they said, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death," i. e. any man whose crimes are of a political nature, who stirs up sedition, and endeavours to alienate subjects from their obedience to the Roman emperor; for these were the points they insisted on, when Pilate inquired into the grounds of their accusation. By their own law, they might have stoned Christ, as they had declared him a blasphemer; but it appears from St. Luke, that, some time before, when they would have put him to death, they feared lest they should themselves be stoned by the people, * and therefore they might think it more adviseable to make Pilate the instrument for the execution of the sentence.—But all these circumstances did not come to pass fortuitously; for,

5. The counsel of God in this event is pointed out by St. John, who adds, "That the saying of Jesus

* Luke, xx. 6.

might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die."* God had appointed that the redemption of the world should be wrought by the death of the cross. This had been predicted by the prophets, and declared by Christ himself, who told his disciples, that he was to be delivered up to the Gentiles, and to be crucified.† This restrained the hands of the Jewish rulers, by whom that painful punishment was not inflicted. St. John makes the observation for the confirmation of our faith; and shows how wisely the counsel of God directed every particular circumstance of our Saviour's passion. We shall conclude with the following observations.

1. Hypocrites generally bring an odium on religion. We have already observed the ironical answer which Pilate returned to the Jews: "Take ye him and judge him according to your law." 'You make a boast of your law, as if it were more perfect than the laws of all other nations; but if it allow putting a man to death, without a hearing, our Roman law is far preferable, which admits of no such unjust practices.' Thus what St. Paul says of the Jews was here verified, "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you."‡ The law, which God gave to the Jews, by no means permitted that any one should be condemned without a fair trial. Hence Nicodemus asks, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" But as the Jews in this instance, urged Pilate to direct the crucifixion of Jesus without any previous examination, it raised

* John, xviii. 32. † Matt. xx. 19.; xxvi. 2.; John, xii. 32.
‡ Rom. ii. 23.

in him a suspicion that their law allowed of such an iniquitous proceeding. This is the conclusion usually drawn by the world from the behaviour of those hypocrites, who make much outward profession of religion, without obeying its divine precepts from the heart. Their sin is the more aggravated as it discredits the profession of religion, and causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of.

2. The providence of God over-ruled the circumstances attending our Saviour's passion, and will also direct whatever befalls his people, in life or in death. The enemies of Christ could not move a step farther, than the divine providence permitted. They could not act exactly as their malice prompted them; but the events of his life and death were directed by the predetermined counsel and decree of God. In vain did they endeavour at Nazareth to precipitate Jesus down the rock;* in vain did the impious Jews attempt to stone him;† and in vain was it that Pilate said, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law." The manner of our Saviour's death was exactly to correspond with the predictions of the prophets, and the previous declaration of the Lord Jesus himself. Satan and his instruments acted, indeed, according to the impulse of their own wicked minds; yet divine wisdom conducted every part of this important transaction. Hence many things fell out contrary to the designs and wishes of the enemies of Christ. It is therefore said in scripture, "Truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined."‡ The same providence which accompanied our Saviour from his birth to his death, will also direct all contingencies through life

* Luke, iv. 29. † John, viii. 59. ‡ Luke, xxi. 22.

for our good, and will be our guide unto death, if we resign ourselves to the divine guidance. Let us commit our ways to the Lord; so shall we find by experience, that every thing which befalls us is directed by eternal wisdom and infinite love.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living God, blessed be thy holy name for permitting thy beloved Son to fall into the hands of wicked men, and to be led before unrighteous judges. Bless that part of thy sacred word which we have now discussed; and imprint on our hearts the important truths which have been drawn from it, for Jesus Christ's sake our Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST EXAMINATION OF JESUS CHRIST BEFORE THE TRIBUNAL OF PONTIUS PILATE.

"*And Jesus stood before the governor. And they began*
"*to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting*
"*the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar,*
"*saying, that he himself is Christ a king. Then Pilate*
"*entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus,*
"*and asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews?*
"*Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself,*
"*or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered,*
"*Am I a Jew? thine own nation, and the chief priests*
"*have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?*"

In these words we have an account of the first inquiry into our Saviour's cause before Pontius Pilate.

The enemies of Christ were displeased with Pilate, because he did not immediately believe their assertion, that Jesus was guilty, but took upon himself to inquire into the nature of the accusation brought against him. But when they found that the affair was not likely to come to so speedy an issue as they had hoped, they were under the necessity of laying before the Roman Governor the nature of the charge.

1. "Jesus stood before the governor." When Pilate, at the request of the Jews, went out of the hall of judgment to confer with them, they presented Jesus to him bound as a malefactor. He, who was appointed of God to be the judge of quick and dead, stood before Pilate as a criminal. A person of exalted and transcendent merit, permitted himself to be confronted with malicious accusers before an unrighteous judge, that we might obtain boldness to stand before the righteous Judge, and that our accusers might be ashamed and confounded. How astonishing the spectacle, that the "heir of all things," who from eternity is exalted above all, should stand at the bar of a creature.

2. The accusation urged against our Saviour is related by St. Luke. The substance was this: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king."

By the first part of the charge, that of perverting the nation, their design might be to represent the Lord Jesus as a false prophet, who wished to seduce the people from their ancient religion, and perplex them by his doctrine. But the principal object was to represent him as a promoter of sedition, a re-

bellious person, who alienated the Jewish nation from their obedience to the Roman emperor, forbade them to contribute to the support of government, and assumed the title of king, to the prejudice of the sovereign of the country. They concluded that Pilate would be extremely incensed at this; he being appointed by the Roman emperor to superintend what related to his interest, and to keep a watchful eye over any appearance of sedition or tumult among the Jews. All these allegations were however false, and destitute of proof.

3. They couched their accusation in terms, expressive of the most virulent contempt of our Lord, not deigning so much as to mention his name; and spoke with such confidence, as if they had surprised our Saviour in the very fact, in the actual execution or avowal of his seditious designs. Hence we may deduce the following remarks.

1. It is the practice of hypocrites to charge the faithful servants of God with crimes, of which they themselves are guilty.

The teachers of the Jews were at that time guilty of all the crimes which they lay to the charge of our Saviour. They were the persons who alienated the people from the true religion and service of God, and perverted their minds, by enjoining the traditions and ordinances of men.* They were the persons who fomented the seditious inclination of the Jewish people; for they made it a subject of dispute in their schools, whether the tribute imposed on them by the Roman emperor was consistent with the freedom of the people of God. They were the persons who

* Matt. xv. 4.

instilled into the minds of the people the expectation of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, as a puissant prince; consequently, they were guilty of the very crimes which they laid to the charge of the Lord Jesus.

2. The most innocent and irreproachable behaviour is not a sufficient security against calumny and false accusations. What more could our blessed Saviour have done to avoid the suspicion of rebellion and seditious practices? When the people would have taken him by force, to make him a king, he fled from them.* He paid tribute money for himself and Peter;† and when, about four days before his passion, he was asked, whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, he replied, "Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God, the things which are God's." Even his enemies could not make the least exception against this decision, but were astonished at his answer, and went away without saying a word.‡ But all this caution was not sufficient to secure our Saviour from the imputation of entertaining rebellious designs. —If the great captain of our salvation was thus basely treated, his members can certainly expect no better treatment from his and their inveterate enemies. Therefore be of good courage, all ye that are determined to follow Christ as your leader, and to walk innocently and unblameably amidst a perverse and wicked generation. Do not expect that your utmost precautions will secure you against calumny, lies, and slanderous imputations; think not such treatment strange or uncommon; but comfort yourselves, since your blessed chief was thus treated, and be

* John, vi. 15. † Matt. xvii. 17. ‡ Luke, xx. 26.

content to resemble the first-born among many brethren, whom Christ will translate into his glorious kingdom.

3. It is a common practice with nominal Christians, and men of the world, when reports are spread to the prejudice of pious men, to suppose, that such reports must have some foundation, otherwise they would not be so current; that what all the world says must be true. But a facility in crediting such reports arises from nothing but enmity against Christ and his members. Let us examine ourselves, and ask our own hearts, how comes it to pass, that we are so ready to believe the worst calumnies, and the most scandalous reports against the faithful servants and followers of Christ?

4. The behaviour of Jesus, in patiently bearing false accusations, must be a source of great comfort to his faithful servants: for by this part of his sufferings, he has expiated our fall, and the depravity which we derive from our first parents. We have naturally an evil refractory heart, full of rebellion against God and our lawful superiors. We have refused to pay the tribute of gratitude and obedience which we owe to our Creator. Many of us are also impatient under the yoke of allegiance to the civil powers, and would defraud them of their tribute and dues, by illegal practices. * We all by nature desire greatness; we are inflamed with ambition and pride; and would rather command than be subject to lawful authority. All these faults our Mediator has expiated, on our sincere repentance and faith in his name. He has also sanctified the sufferings of his faithful ser-

* Rom. xiii. 7.

vants, who are often calumniated by the world, as a rebellious, seditious description of men; because they cannot blindly submit to human ordinances in matters which affect their own consciences and the honour of God; but adhere to the apostle's rule, viz. "We ought to obey God rather than men." Upon such occasions, they must expect to be accused as men who pervert the people, trample on authority, and disturb the public peace.

Let us give thanks and praise to our faithful Saviour and Redeemer, for submitting to such accusations, and thus opening for us a source of comfort. Let us show our gratitude, in a readiness to undergo any calumny or unjust accusation for his sake. At the same time, let us be cautious, that we neither raise or countenance any false report against others, nor, by seditious and rebellious practices, bring a reproach on the doctrines of the gospel.—We proceed to consider,

The behaviour of Pilate. "Then Pilate entered into the judgment-hall again, and called Jesus, and asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews?" In this conduct of Pilate, he is to be commended for hearing both sides, and for examining into the affair himself, and not shifting off the trouble by appointing others to report the case to him.—We find him particularly insisting on the last article of the accusation, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" He could not but know that the Jews expected a Messiah, who, as a king and conqueror, was to deliver them from foreign dominion, to subject other nations to them, and to procure them great earthly blessings. He therefore wished to know whether Jesus was that Messiah, or

triumphant prince, whom the Jews expected. If our blessed Saviour were king of the Jews, Pilate doubtless thought it natural for him to use endeavours to gain the affections of his subjects, and to alienate them from their allegiance to the Roman emperor; and in case of his success, that the refusal of paying tribute to the Roman government would have followed of course.

It appears also, that Pilate put this question with some degree of surprise, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" As if he had said, 'from thy outward appearance, thy bonds, and fetters, it is what I should never have imagined.' The great and wise of this world judge of the kingdom of Jesus Christ from its external appearance; and as they observe in it no outward pomp or splendour, they despise or revile it.

Before this question of Pilate was answered by the Lord Jesus, he, in return, put another question to Pilate: "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" As if he had said, 'Have you observed in me or in my behaviour at Jerusalem, any thing which could raise in you a well-grounded suspicion, that I attempt to make myself king of Judea, or to seduce the people from their obedience to the Romans? Or, have others who are my enemies, charged me with this, without giving you any proof of their allegations, and so far imposed on your judgment, that you are prepared to believe it?'

By this question, our Lord intimates that Pilate does not scrupulously adhere to the rules of equity. For, it was not just to proceed to interrogate the prisoner on the bare accusation of the Jews, unsup-

ported by any legal proofs, and without inquiring into the grounds of their charge. It was likewise an irregular proceeding to refer to the declaration of the party accused for the truth of a fact, which ought to have been proved by witnesses; since no party can be a witness in his own cause. By this question, our Lord endeavours to clear up the ambiguity of Pilate's question; and prepares a way for the confession which he afterwards made concerning the true nature of his kingdom. The Messiah had, in the writings of the prophets, been often represented as the king of Israel. "Thus saith the Lord, the king of Israel, and his Redeemer."*—"The king of Israel, even the Lord is in the midst of thee."†—"Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold, thy king cometh unto thee."‡ Hence it was, that even the Eastern Magi, when they inquired after our Saviour, said, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"§ But Pilate, who was a stranger to the writings of the prophets, could certainly by the title of king of the Jews, understand no other than a temporal sovereign. Jesus therefore inquires, Whether Pilate spoke this of himself, and gave him the title of king of the Jews in a political sense, or, whether the Jews had suggested it to him, (who were bound to form their idea of the king of the Jews according to the prophetic writings,) and consequently whether he meant a spiritual king? If our Lord had directly answered the question in the negative, it would have admitted, that he was not that king of Israel, whose coming had been predicted by the prophets; and if without adding any illustration, he had answered

* Isaiah, xliv. 6. † Zephaniah, iii. 15. ‡ Zechariah, ix. 9.
§ Matt. ii. 2.

in the affirmative, it might have been concluded that he claimed to be a temporal king. Therefore before our Saviour makes his confession, he would ascertain the sense of the question put to him by Pilate.

This is followed by Pilate's answer: "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation, and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: What hast thou done?"

Pilate shows that he was displeased at the question of Jesus. As if he had said, 'What have I to do with the wranglings of the Jews about religion? It is no concern of mine to know what king they may expect. I have more important business than to read their books, and inquire into their superstitions.' In this appears his contempt of the Jewish people, and their religion; this they had partly brought on themselves by the degradation of their moral character. He no doubt spoke in a tone of contempt and haughtiness; considering it a great scandal to be a Jew; and being offended that our Lord, being a Jew, should have the boldness to put such a question to him.—We often observe politicians and statesmen treating the most important and fundamental truths of the Christian religion, as mere theological altercations, and speaking of religion itself with contemptuous levity.

Pilate mentions the persons who had put him upon asking this question: "Thine own people, and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me." 'Thou mightest have gone throughout Judea, preaching and teaching, without any molestation from me. But thine own nation, the most venerable and learned among thy people, have brought thee hither, and accuse thee of having given thyself out to be a king.'—

He adds; "What hast thou done?" 'Thou must have given a handle for some such accusation; or thou must have offended the people, and by some flagitious crime drawn their hatred upon thee.'—We hence may learn the following truths.

1. Christ's magnanimity, in his behaviour towards Pilate, may comfort his suffering members. He will graciously impart to them the courage and firmness which he shall see necessary for their respective circumstances. Let no Christian, though naturally timorous and fearful, say within himself, 'Alas! should persecution arise for the sake of the truth, should it be my lot to be brought before magistrates and courts of judicature, to give an answer of the reason of the hope that is in me, I am afraid that I shall greatly prejudice the cause of Christ.' Let none give way to such desponding thoughts; for Christ will, in the hour of trial, communicate the fortitude and holy confidence which you stand in need of. Hence the weakest of Christ's people, in violent persecutions, have declared the truth in an undaunted manner. No less consolatory is the consummate wisdom and prudence which shone forth in Jesus, who was not perplexed by an ambiguous question; but cleared up its obscurity, and used the utmost caution not to prejudice the truth. Satan is very industrious and artful in his endeavours to confound our ideas of the essential truths of religion, that he may afterwards take the advantage of our doubts and perplexities. In this work, none do him more service than those learned men who, by abstruse notions and scholastic subtilties, so obscure the clearest truths, that others of less sagacity are entirely at a loss how to unravel

them. Jesus Christ the eternal word, who at the first creation caused the light to shine out of darkness, accounts it a part of his prophetic and mediatorial office, to extricate truth from perplexity, and to reduce to order that confusion which sin has introduced. It is well for us that we have such an all-wise Mediator, seeing we have to contend with a subtil enemy, who tries a thousand ways to circumvent us, and would take advantage of our simplicity, did not the watchful care of the blessed Jesus prevent us from falling. It is a comfort to persecuted Christians, harassed with ambiguous questions, that Jesus Christ, their Lord, who was himself tempted as they are, has a compassionate tenderness for his conflicting servants, and will give them a mouth and wisdom.*

2. It is our duty as the followers of Christ to walk circumspectly.

Our Saviour could with all boldness meet the charges of his accusers. This undaunted firmness was the effect of his innocence. He has given an admirable pattern for our compliance with the apostolic injunction; "Abstain from all appearance of evil."† Many are the malignant observers that narrowly watch every step of the children of God, and put the worst construction on their actions. It behoves them therefore carefully to avoid whatever may be construed to their disadvantage. To this end, it is requisite to preserve a tender conscience, a constant self-denial, and a continual watchfulness over our inward thoughts and outward demeanour. These precautions must also be accompanied with incessant prayer, that the om-

* Luke, xxi. 15. † 1 Thess. v. 22.

niscient God, who counteth all our steps, will establish our goings by his word; for whoever sets about this arduous task, relying merely on his own strength, wisdom, and prudence, may expect to fall.

3. Each of us may apply this question of Pilate to himself: "What hast thou done?"

Of the blessed Jesus it is said in scripture, "He did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth;* he went about doing good."† The malefactor, who was crucified with him testified: "This man hath done nothing amiss." Yea, Christ himself says in the face of the enraged multitude, "Many good works have I showed you of my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?"‡ But when any one of us shall ask his own heart, "What hast thou done? what a multitude of sinful actions will present themselves to the conscience, as recorded in God's book of remembrance! Now amidst the confusion which covers us at the recollection of our many and aggraved offences against God, let us not forget to lift up the eye of faith to Jesus the Lamb of God. To his innocence we may flee for refuge, from the complaints and accusations of conscience.

PRAYER.

We thank thee, O gracious and merciful God, for the comfort which we derive, as guilty and condemned sinners, from the arraignment of our Saviour before the tribunal of the Gentiles. Bless this part of thy word to our souls, that it may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy name. Amen.

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* Isaiah, liii. 9. † Acts, x. 38. ‡ John, x. 32.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOOD CONFESSION OF CHRIST CONCERNING HIS KINGDOM, BEFORE PILATE.

" Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my " kingdom were of this world, then would my servants " fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but " now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore " said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, " Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, " and for this cause came I into the world, that I should " bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the " truth heareth my voice."

In the first part of our Saviour's confession, he rectifies the false idea which Pilate had of his kingdom, acknowledging at the same time, that he really has a kingdom. " My kingdom is not of this world,—if my kingdom were of this world—but now is my kingdom not from hence." His kingdom is indeed *in* the world; since the communion of saints who acknowledge him for their king, is already formed in the world: but it is not *of* this world, i. e. it is not of the same nature with earthly kingdoms. It is not governed according to human laws and institutions, nor defended by carnal weapons or temporal arms, nor conducted with external pomp and ceremony; consequently the Roman emperor had nothing to fear from it. It would not alienate his subjects from their allegiance, nor encroach on his temporal rights. It is true, the kingdoms of this world are under the control of the Son of God.

who disposes of them so as best to contribute to the chastisement of his people, and the protection of his church. "By him kings reign, and princes decree justice." * They all hold their dominions as fiefs from the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and must acknowledge, "that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he will." † But the proper kingdom of Jesus Christ, which he here emphatically calls "My kingdom," (the kingdom which he governs as Mediator between God and man, and the subjects of which he purchased with his blood) is no worldly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom, as it is frequently termed in the gospel.—This kingdom is, in several respects, directly opposite to the kingdoms of this world. In it no unrighteousness has place. The tears of the oppressed are not seen, nor are the groans of suffering innocence heard. It is founded on truth and righteousness, and is governed with mildness, love, and equity. In this kingdom, "the kings strength loveth judgment." ‡ Worldly kingdoms derive their origin from men; but the kingdom of Christ has the immortal God for its founder, who by an eternal decree hath appointed it to the Mediator of the new covenant. §—The laws by which worldly kingdoms are governed, are instituted by men, and the observance of those laws is enforced by pains and penalties; but the laws of the kingdom of Christ derive their sanction from heaven, and are written in the hearts of his subjects by the spirit of love.—The kingdoms of this world affect external pomp and splendour; they dazzle the eye, and thus command respect; but the

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* Prov. viii. 15. † Dan. iv. 17. ‡ Psalms, xcix. 4.
§ Luke, xxii. 29.

kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of the cross, and its ornament consists in the holiness of its subjects.*—The power of temporal kingdoms extends only to the bodies, lives, and possessions of the subjects; but the kingdom of Christ extends its authority over the hearts of his people.—The subjects of the kingdoms of this world consist of a mixture of good and bad men; but the subjects of Jesus Christ are all born of God, and are kings and priests to his heavenly Father.—The kingdoms of this world stand in need of arms and fortresses for their security; but it is not so in the kingdom of Christ, for "the Lord is a wall of fire round about his people." † His subjects may therefore sing, "We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." ‡ The greatest happiness in earthly kingdoms consists in outward ease and affluence: the kingdom of Christ is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. § The kingdoms of this world have their bounds and limits, and are confined to particular nations: but of the kingdom of Christ it is written, "All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him." ‖ Lastly, To earthly kingdoms an appointed time is fixed for their duration; but "of his kingdom there shall be no end." **

Our Lord mentions a proof of the spiritual nature of his kingdom; not drawn from prophecy, or from the authority of the Scriptures, with which Pilate probably had no acquaintance; but such a proof as was adapted to convince a Roman governor. "If my kingdom," says he, "were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be de-

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* Psalms, xciii. 5. † Zech. ii. 5. ‡ Isaiah, xxvi. 1. § Rom. xiv. 17
‖ Psalms, lxxii. 11. ** Luke, i. 33.

livered to the Jews." As if our Lord had said; 'The kings of this world have armies for the protection of their persons and subjects. If I had any design to be an earthly king, I should have provided soldiers to defend my person. My dependants, when the Jews apprehended me, would have made a vigorous resistance. But no such scheme ever entered my thoughts, and my followers are unfit for the execution of such enterprising projects; I myself enjoined them to make no resistance, and you may from this circumstance easily conclude, that I am no earthly monarch, and that from me the emperor has nothing to apprehend.' Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. It is an unspeakable comfort to Christians, that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world. If his kingdom were an earthly kingdom, how hard would be the fate of the poor and wretched! If Christ were an earthly monarch, how difficult would they find it to be admitted into his presence, with their humble petitions; and how often would they be repulsed by the officers of his court! But, as he is a spiritual king, no such difficulties are to be apprehended in approaching him: for it is written of him, "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and save the souls of the indigent. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence."* This description of our king should endear him to our souls, and induce the weakest of his people to place a firm trust in him, and to comfort themselves with the thoughts of being under his almighty protection.

2. As our king is not of this world, so must we,

* Psalms, lxxii. 12.

if we be his true subjects, be separated and distinguished from the men of the world, in our tempers and conduct. "As the king is, so are his subjects." Our blessed Lord himself saith of his disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." * May this important truth sink deep into our hearts! We own *Him* to be our king, who was a pattern of humility and self-abasement; who not only descended from his throne to poverty and bonds, but also publicly renounced the thrones and kingdoms of this world; who fled from the people when they were for making him king by force; who willingly suffered himself to be apprehended, bound, and insulted. If we would be the true and faithful subjects of such a king, we must put on the same meek and lowly disposition; we must rather shun than pursue the honours of this world, banish pride and ambition from our breasts, and be clothed with humility. If we profess ourselves the subjects of a king, who was so poor, that he had not where to lay his head; who was so far from making it his business to amass wealth, and heap up treasures on earth, that for our sakes he became poor; we must, after his example, despise the perishable riches of the world, lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven; and "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Lastly: if we serve a king, whose life was full of troubles and hardships; who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for our souls; we, according to his example, should exercise ourselves in self-denial, temperance,

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* John, xvii. 16.

and purity of heart. Thus, from the very nature of the kingdom of Christ, arise the strongest motives for denying the inordinate love of honours, riches, and pleasures; motives of infinitely greater weight than any which reason or philosophy can suggest. Let us, then, seriously ask our own hearts, whether we are subjects whose temper and conversation bear a resemblance to those of our Lord and King? We greatly deceive ourselves, if we suppose that all those who call themselves Christians are true subjects of Christ, or citizens of that kingdom which is not of this world. Whoever suffers proud, covetous, or sensual dispositions to exercise dominion over him, is a slave of Satan, the God of this world. Let every one, who still finds himself in this miserable state, lift up his hands and heart to the King of kings, and pray to him, that he would renew a right temper of mind within him, and make him truly subject to that sceptre of righteousness, which is the sceptre of his kingdom.

3. The faithful servants of Jesus Christ must fight valiantly for their king, and the honour of his kingdom.

When our blessed Saviour says, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered up to the Jews," he alludes to the duty which is justly imposed on the subjects of earthly sovereigns to fight for their king, when he is threatened with any danger. Hence the inference is obvious, that if we would be real servants and subjects of Jesus Christ, our spiritual king, we must fight for him in a manner conformable to the spiritual nature of his kingdom; not with carnal weapons, but with the weapons of God, which are

mighty to the casting down of every high thing, that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and the obedience of Christ. * This is, indeed, in a more particular manner, the duty of ministers of the gospel, who are not to be cold and indifferent; or from a love of outward ease and security, to withdraw themselves from the combat. On the contrary, they must contend for the truth, as St. Paul exhorts Timothy, "Endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." † In this combat for the sake of the gospel, sufferings must be expected. When the cause of Christ and his kingdom is assailed, we must be ready to meet the attacks of slanderers and malicious libellers: according as our situations may be, we must defend the truth with our prayers, our tongues, and our pens; and in this spiritual warfare, be prepared to sacrifice character, ease, and substance, nay, even life itself; we must put on the armour of prayer, and take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. By these distinguishing marks, every one may prove himself, whether he be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ; whether he has resolution and spirit to risk every thing for his honour; or, whether, when the honour of his sovereign is injured, and divine truths attacked, he will stand as an unconcerned spectator, and thus betray the honour of his King.

Our blessed Saviour proceeds to explain the true nature of his kingdom. This part of our Lord's confession was occasioned by Pilate's second question, "Art thou a king then?" The governor probably surmised at first, that the Jews accused Christ of pretending to be a king, out of mere malice. But now

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* 2 Cor. x. 5. † 2 Tim. ii. 3.

he hears Jesus thrice make mention of his kingdom. This perplexed Pilate, who concluded that Christ must be a temporal king; and no doubt thought it strange, that there should be kingdoms which were not of this world. He therefore repeats his question. Our Lord replied, "Thou sayest that I am a king." Thus, as our blessed Saviour had acknowledged himself to be the *Son of God*, in plain and explicit terms, before the spiritual court of the Jews; so does he here before the civil tribunal of Pilate, with the same clearness, declare himself to be the *king of Israel*. Had life been dearer to him than the truth, he might easily have procured a release from his bonds, by an ambiguous evasive answer, and might have said, I am no king, i. e. I am not a king in your sense of the word. But the blessed Jesus disdains all subterfuge; and instead of giving any sanction to equivocations and mental evasions, he shows by his behaviour on this occasion, that truth is boldly to be acknowledged before kings and rulers. Our Lord proceeds to set forth the true nature of his kingly office, and the distinguishing character of the subjects of his kingdom.

The true nature of his kingly office is explained in these words: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." His dominion is not confined to the goods and earthly possessions of men, but extends itself to the conscience; and the design of his government is to bring his people to the acknowledgment of the truth. It was a truth unknown to human reason; a truth which his heavenly Father had declared by Moses and the prophets in types and figures, by promises and predictions. The substance of this great truth, is, that as no man can

be justified, and consequently entitled to eternal happiness, by the works of the law, God, out of his infinite love to mankind, has given his Son as the Saviour and reconciler of the world, to the end that all who acknowledge their own total inability, believe on the name of the great Mediator, and give themselves up to be renewed, by the Spirit, in the image of God, may not perish, but have everlasting life. This doctrine of the gospel is emphatically styled the truth, not only as it derives its origin from God, who is truth itself, but likewise as it is a well-grounded infallible truth, and worthy of all acceptation. Of this great truth, the blessed Jesus was to bear witness both in his words and actions; and therefore he is called "the faithful witness;" * and the Father hath declared, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people." † He has likewise all the qualifications requisite for a witness. If it be necessary that a witness should have heard or seen the things which he testifies, the Son of God was himself present in the council of the Father, in which it was graciously determined, that the world should be redeemed by the Son. Jesus voluntarily promised to take on himself the work of redemption, and his Almighty Father in return promised that he would anoint and establish him, as a king over the human race. Therefore he might justly say, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." ‡ Hence also, John Baptist says of him, "He that cometh from above is above all; and what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth." §

Moreover, our Lord subjoins, with a peculiar energy,

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* Rev. i. 5. † Isaiah, lv. 4. ‡ John, iii. 11.
§ John, iii. 31.

that "for this end he was born, and came into the world," as the great ambassador of God, "to bear witness unto the truth." These words imply his prior existence, and that he was in possession of his regal dignity before he became visible in the world. He came to convince mankind, that he is the only sacrifice for the sins of the world; that whoever will be saved, must believe on his name. He came to free mankind from the dominion and tyranny of the spirit of error, to enlighten them with the true light, and to fit them for the service of God, in spirit and in truth. Our Lord describes, also,

The distinguishing characteristic of his subjects; "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Their characteristic is that "They are of the truth." That is, in other words, they receive the testimony which God has given of his Son, and which the Son himself has given of the truth, so as to be enlightened, converted, and renewed from the heart; to hate evil, and to love and obey the truth. The duty of the subjects of Christ is to hear his voice: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice," acknowledges me for his sovereign, and obeys my precepts from the heart. When Christ says, "Repent and believe the gospel!" he hears and obeys. When Christ says, "Whoever will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me: Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you: Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's:" the Christian omits no opportunity of complying with these commands.

This was such discourse as had never before been heard in Pilate's hall of judgment. By this testimony

of the truth, Christ intended, not only to remove Pilate's groundless apprehensions, of his having instigated the emperor's subjects to revolt; but likewise to make an impression on his heart, to awaken his conscience, and to inspire him with a love of truth. We shall make the following observations.

1. Our blessed Saviour, by declaring his real dignity, has publicly claimed us as his subjects. We must therefore approve ourselves such, by forsaking the world and its evil customs. If Christ our king declared, that he was born and came into the world to bear witness unto truth, his people will love the truth, and bear witness to it in their words and actions.

2. As the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of truth, no one can be admitted into it, who loveth or maketh a lie. Satan is in scripture called the father of lies;* and the account given of his subjects by St. John† is, that they love and take a pleasure in forging lies. In Satan's kingdom there is nothing but falsehood and deception. He infatuates men by giving them false ideas of God, whom they vainly imagine to be like themselves. Hence God says to the wicked; "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself."‡ Satan also deceives men with false ideas of repentance: he teaches them to be content with the confession that they are miserable sinners; that they are sorry for their misdoings, and that they will amend their lives; while the heart, in the mean time, is not touched, nor is there any change wrought in it. He infatuates men with false ideas of faith: they vainly suppose they shall be saved by the merits of Christ, although they continue under the dominion of sin,

* John, viii. 44. † Rev. xxii. 15. ‡ Psalms, l. 21.

and never show the reality of their faith by love to God and to their neighbour. Such is the power of the spirit of darkness over the understandings of those whom he hath led captive. But his chains fall off when a man is regenerated and translated into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Then he learns to look on the things of the Spirit of God in a new and a different light. Then he is sensible what an absurd and unworthy idea he had entertained of God, of repentance, and of faith. The light of truth shines upon his understanding; and his error, prejudice, and false conceptions of spiritual things, are dissipated. The image of God in Jesus Christ is formed in his will; and the Spirit of God restores his soul to the divine resemblance, in wisdom, righteousness, and truth. He now loveth and speaketh the truth from his heart; and is not ashamed to confess it, at whatever risk.

3. A mere acknowledgment of the truth is not sufficient: it must have a salutary effect on our lives and conversation.

Hence our blessed Saviour does not say, "He that acknowledges the truth is my subject and disciple;" but "Every one that is of the truth," i. e. to whom truth and probity are become, as it were, habitual, so as to influence all his thoughts, words, and actions: "hears my voice," or obeys me as his sovereign. There must be such an inward and universal obedience of the heart, an attention and sincere obedience to all his commands, a lively faith in all his promises, and a conviction of the value and certainty of the invisible rewards expected from him, as to make us ready to renounce and part with all temporal enjoyments for his sake.

Dost thou therefore boast, that thou hast heard the voice of the Lord Jesus? What happy effect has it had on thy soul? Thinkest thou that the voice of the Son of God is a dead and ineffectual sound, suffering men to stagnate in carnal security? By no means: the voice of Christ is said to be like the "sound of many waters."* Has that sound therefore awakened thee from the sleep of security? "The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the voice of the Lord discovereth the forests."† Has that glorious voice shaken thy heart? Has it cast down thy high imaginations? Has it torn up the ill habits so deeply rooted in thee? These effects are not like the fleeting images of a dream, but leave a lasting and indelible impression on the heart, during the whole course of a man's life. Look on others who have heard the voice of Christ, and see what a change it has wrought in them. Matthew the publican heard his voice, saying, "Follow me!" and immediately he left all, and followed Christ; Simon and Andrew heard his voice, and they forsook all, and followed him; the young man, who died at Nain, heard his voice, arose and revived. His voice spoke Lazarus into life; the man afflicted with the palsy heard it, and took up the bed on which he had been laid. Saul heard his voice; and of a persecutor and destroyer of the Christians, became a champion for the truth of the gospel. Nay, it is said in St. John's gospel, "The hour is coming, and now is, when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."‡ And dost thou, O man, live the life that is of

* Rev. i. 15. † Psalms, xxix. 5. ‡ John, v. 25.

God, or art thou still dead in trespasses and sins? Examine thyself well on this point! It is no inconsiderable fault for a man to stop his ears, and close his heart against the voice of Christ; for whoever refuses to hear him, the same also he will not hear, nor answer in the hour of extreme distress.* Alas! whither then canst thou betake thyself, if thou hast not obediently heard the Saviour's voice, and conformed to it? What dependance canst thou have, that he will hear thy faint and broken accents at the approach of death? How dreadful will be thy case if He, who alone has power to save and condemn, should then turn his ears from thy cries! O let us hear his voice to-day, this instant; and while we hear his voice, let us not harden our hearts. Let us turn our ears from the delusive voice of Satan and the world. It is enough that we have spent the past years of our lives in such courses. Let us now penitently approach the blessed Jesus, acknowledging and bewailing our former disobedience. Let us entreat him to give us the attentive ear, and the obedient heart. Let us sincerely believe his promising voice; let us obey the precepts of his commanding voice; so that one day it may be our happiness to hear his affectionate voice, saying unto us, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, whose merits are infinite, thanks be to thee for the good confession of thy kingdom,

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* Prov. i. 24.

which thou madest before Pilate! Praised be thy name for teaching us the nature of thy spiritual kingdom! Thou seest, O Lord, what gross conceptions and carnal ideas we are apt to entertain of it; be pleased therefore to inspire us with a salutary knowledge of thy kingly office, and to impart to us that heavenly temper and disposition which is the distinguishing badge of thy true subjects. Make us truly attentive to thy voice, that by our walking in the truth, and abhorring all false ways, it may appear to ourselves, and to the world, that we are thy subjects, and consequently joint-heirs of thy glorious kingdom. And to those who suffer for thee here, and contend for thy truth, by the confession of thy religion, grant that they may eternally reign with thee on thy throne, as thou hast overcome, and art exalted to the throne of thy Father! Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR'S GOOD CONFESSION BEFORE PILATE.

" *Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had*
" *said this, he went out unto the Jews, and saith unto the*
" *chief priests and the people, I find no fault in this man.*
" *And the chief priests were the more fierce. And when*
" *he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he*
" *answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, An-*
" *swerest thou nothing? hearest thou not how many*
" *things they witness against thee? Jesus answered him*
" *to never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled*
" *greatly.*"

Two things followed our Lord's confession: *First*, A question from the Roman governor; and *secondly*, an acknowledgment of our blessed Saviour's innocence.

1. The question was: "What is truth?" Jesus had several times mentioned the word truth; "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one who is of the truth heareth my voice." Upon this, Pilate starts the question, "What is truth?" One would, from these words, be inclined to entertain a favourable opinion of Pilate, and to admire his willingness to be instructed. One should be apt to think, that the words of Jesus had kindled in him such a desire of knowing the truth, that he wished for nothing more passionately than to be instructed by this divine prophet, of whom he had heard such a

character. But this good opinion, which might be conceived of Pilate, is in some measure affected by his subsequent behaviour. It does not appear that he waited for an answer, for he went forth to the Jews who were standing without the judgment-hall. Hence it is too probable, that he did not ask this question from any desire of information; but in an ironical manner, and with a mind filled with prejudices against the truth. To this question, Pilate added,

2. A confession of the innocence of Jesus. For when Pilate had said this, he went out again to the Jews, who were gathered together before his judgment-hall, and called out in the hearing of the chief priests and all the people, "I find no fault in this man." 'I have examined this man apart, concerning the things of which you accuse him, and have carefully sifted the whole matter; but I find him guilty of no crime. You say, you found him perverting the people; but I can find no shadow of truth in this accusation. He, indeed, owns that he is a king; but, at the same time he declares, that he makes it his sole business to bear witness to the truth. This confession, by the Roman law, is no capital crime. If that were the case, all the philosophers throughout the Roman empire would deserve to be crucified; since every one of them thinks he teaches nothing but the truth. If this person has too high a conceit of his doctrines, and thinks that he alone is so quick-sighted as to see clearly into truth, this is a failing common to philosophers, and rather deserves pity than punishment. At least with regard to the faults you charge him with, I find him entirely innocent.' Such, probably, was the opinion of Pilate; and this declara-

ration of our Saviour's innocence he publicly made before all the people. This was a measure of policy: for as he knew that the rulers of the people had delivered up Christ out of envy, he thought it best publicly to declare his innocence, that the people might have an opportunity of taking the innocent prisoner under their protection.

This testimony, which Pilate gives of our Lord's innocence, is of great importance: for he was a person acting in a public character, and the Roman emperor's vicegerent; consequently it was incumbent on him to punish all rebellious and seditious persons. He also appears to have been impartial in this affair, and not prejudiced either for or against Jesus; he gave testimony of his innocence, after having heard the charge and examined the prisoner; and he did it voluntarily, and not at the request of any one.

The scene of things continues the same in our days, as it was before Pilate's judgment-seat. On one side stood the blessed Jesus, in defence of the truth, which he maintained, and at last sealed with his blood; on the other side stood the Jews in opposition to the truth, which they hated and persecuted in the person and doctrine of Christ: and between these stood Pilate, ridiculing and despising both parties. Thus in our days these three parties still exist. Some have a sense of the transcendent value of the truth; they esteem it an invaluable jewel committed to mankind; and accordingly they openly profess it, and are ready to sacrifice their lives and fortunes, and all that is dear and valuable in its defence. Others show themselves its declared enemies; endeavour to suppress it, by changing it into error and falsehood, and hate and persecute its professors. Others again observe a cul-

pable neutrality, ridiculing both parties; and pretending that each is equally in the wrong, and that the truths which excite so much contention, are of no importance. Controversies about the truth appear to them mere cavils about words; and if matters go well with them, if they enjoy riches, honours, and pleasures, they care not how it fares with the truth. The cause of this is assigned by St. Paul in these words: "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send on them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteness." * It is but just that they who despise the truth, should be deprived of its light, and cast into darkness.—A scandalous indifference to the truth prevails not only amongst the wise, the learned, and the great, who treat religion as not worth inquiry, but likewise amongst the lower classes of society, the generality of whom are more taken up in providing for the necessaries of life, than in inquiring how they may obtain a knowledge of the saving truths of the gospel.

We come, in the next place, to consider what followed with regard to the accusers of Christ. It appears that they were still more irritated; for they would by no means have it supposed, that they had condemned an innocent man. St. Mark says, that the chief priests accused him of many things. They not only repeated their former charge; but enlarged and aggravated the accusation, by many new and fictitious articles. They concluded, that the greater

* 2 Thess. ii. 10.

number of crimes they laid to his charge, the more probability there was of overwhelming our Saviour's innocence; that if one complaint should not incense Pilate against him, another might prove more effectual; and that if a single charge should not have the desired effect, yet all the articles taken together might turn the scale. We may here remark that,

As we have accumulated sin to sin, so in our Saviour's sufferings, one offence upon another was laid to his charge. What innumerable sins have been the consequence of the fall! How has the venom, which lurked in the disobedience of our first parents, spread itself into numberless channels, and infected their unhappy descendants! The Son of God suffered one accusation upon another to be heaped on him, in order to cover the multitude of our sins. This comfort is best valued by the awakened conscience, which on a view of its transgressions is ready to cry out, "My sins are more in number than the hairs of my head, or the sand on the sea-shore."* The sinner thus terrified at the number and heinousness of his sins, may be comforted with the assurance that he shall be safe under the protection of his Saviour's innocence, whatever accusations Satan may bring against him.

Lastly, We remark the silence of our Lord under these repeated accusations. The governor exclaimed, "Answerest thou nothing?" 'Art thou quite insensible to thy reputation and safety, since thy life and character are at stake? Dost thou not hear thyself accused of crimes, which the law punishes with death? How canst thou be silent at such a crisis, and suffer

* Psalms, xl. 13.—Prayer of Manasseh.

thine enemies to accuse thee without making any defence?' "Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?" Hence it may, with some probability, be inferred, that the chief priests and elders brought witnesses with them before Pilate, to confirm their charges. Notwithstanding all this, our Lord continued silent. It seems as if Pilate had some compassion on Jesus, and imagined that his silence might proceed from fear and despondency; and these words may be considered as an encouragement to him, to vindicate himself in the best manner he could.—The evangelist however informs us, that "Jesus answered him never a word." Neither the high rank of his accusers, nor the heinousness of the accusation, nor yet Pilate's encouraging question, could induce the blessed Jesus to break his silence. Now this silence was founded both in propriety and justice. He had before made an ample confession of the truth. He knew that the judge himself was perfectly convinced of his innocence. The charges too, which the Jews alleged against him, consisted of things either manifestly false, or of such a nature, that they did not properly fall under the cognizance of Pilate. Our Lord was also desirous to show his willingness to die for us, by suffering the sentence of death to be executed, without offering any plea in arrest of judgment; and he was to fulfil the prophecies which had before declared, that "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." *

We have here an account of the effect which our Saviour's silence had on Pilate. "The governor marvelled greatly." It must have appeared strange

* Isaiah, liii. 7.; Psalms, xxxviii. 14

to Pilate, that a criminal should be silent at such a juncture. He therefore wondered at the extreme timidity, or rather at the magnanimity of Jesus; who seemed to despise all the accusations brought against him, and suffered them in silence. In conclusion, we shall make one remark.

Christ in his silence before Pilate appeared in the form of a sinner, and atoned for our clamorous importunities, and false justifications in our defence. When a sinner is awakened by his conscience, and his secret sins are placed before his eyes, he no longer pretends to excuse and justify himself; but lays his hand on his mouth, and owns himself guilty. Now Christ, having permitted the sins of the whole world to be imputed to him, by his silence on this occasion before Pilate, appeared as a sinner, who, under the condemnation of conscience, dares not open his mouth. And as our petulant tongues are so ready, and our voices so loud in palliating our sins, when perhaps our hearts at the very time are convinced that we are guilty, our blessed Saviour was silent for the expiation of this depravity of human nature. Let us therefore thankfully acknowledge, that our Redeemer was silent in our stead, and praise him for this instance of his love. Let us henceforth cease to justify our faults, and excuse our offences. Let us say with holy Job, "I have uttered that I understood not, therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." * Oh, that we may thus judge ourselves! and then we shall not be judged, nor condemned of the Lord.

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* Job, xlii. 3.

PRAYER.

We praise thee, O faithful and ever-living Saviour, for all the sufferings which thou didst patiently endure, to procure for us the forgiveness of our sins. May every insult, every indignity and unjust treatment, to which thou didst submit in our stead, be for our eternal advantage! When we acknowledge our guilt, clothe us with the spotless robe of thy innocence. When the consciousness of our numberless misdeeds alarms us, and renders us incapable of pleading for ourselves, be thou our intercessor; and grant that fleeing to thee we may find safety, and be acquitted from all the accusations brought against us at the Divine tribunal. Grant this for thy mercy's sake! Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST BEFORE HEROD.

" *And the chief priests were the more fierce, saying, He*
" *stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry,*
" *beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate*
" *heard of Galilee, he asked, Whether the man were a*
" *Galilean? And as soon as he knew that he belonged*
" *to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who*
" *himself was also at Jerusalem at that time. And*
" *when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for*
" *he was desirous to see him of a long season, because*
" *he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to*
" *have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned*
" *with him in many words; but Jesus answered him*
" *nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and*

" *vehemently accused him. And Herod and his men of*
" *war set him at nought, and mocked him; and arrayed*
" *him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.*
" *And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends*
" *together; for before they were at enmity between them-*
" *selves.*"

When the chief priests observed that Pilate not only was convinced of our Lord's innocence, but had made a public declaration of it, they were still more exasperated, and assailed the blessed Jesus with renewed violence. They had still nothing new to urge with any appearance of truth, to induce Pilate to comply with their desires; they therefore repeat their former charge of rebellion, "He stirreth up the people." Though Pilate had not the least proof of his having hitherto occasioned any tumults or insurrections, they would insinuate that his doctrines tended to excite among them a dangerous spirit, which might at last terminate in revolt. These words, "beginning from Galilee to this place," were added with a crafty design. To discharge themselves from the obligation of bringing proofs of the charge, they appeal to Galilee, which lay at a distance on the confines of Judea, from whence witnesses could not soon be procured. They likewise intended to give Pilate a worse opinion of Jesus, because he was of that province; the Galileans at that time being considered as a seditious, turbulent people. Some years before, Judas, a Galilean, had excited a revolt, on account of some new tax imposed upon that country.* Even Pilate himself, not long before, had been troubled by the Galileans; and when some of the revolters came to

* Acts, v. 37.

Jerusalem, he massacred them in the temple: so that their blood was mingled with that of their sacrifices.—By this hint, however, the accusers of Jesus occasioned his being sent to Herod, because Galilee was under his jurisdiction. Pilate the more readily embraced this opportunity, as he was very desirous to get rid of the affair. He immediately asked, "Whether the man were a Galilean?" The Jews made no difficulty to answer in the affirmative; and Pilate, concluding that Jesus was a subject of Herod, sent him to that king, who was then at Jerusalem, probably on account of the Passover. This Herod, who was surnamed Antipas, was the son of Herod who massacred the innocent children at Bethlehem. He was the same who had caused John the Baptist to be beheaded,* and who had likewise endeavoured to destroy Jesus.† The authority of Herod particularly extended over that part of Judea which was called Galilee;‡ hence he is styled Tetrarch of Galilee, and on this account disputes might be supposed to arise, between him and the Roman governor Pilate, as to the extent of Herod's jurisdiction.

To this Herod the blessed Jesus was now sent. Pilate availed himself of this expedient, to avoid on the one hand, condemning a person whom he looked upon as innocent, and on the other, incurring the hatred of the Jewish priests and people by releasing him. He concluded that as Herod was a Jew, he could best decide the cause, which seemed principally to relate to the Jewish religion. Pilate wished at the same time to pay a compliment to Herod; in hopes, perhaps, of some mutual accommodation. Such seem

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* Matt. xiv. 10. † Luke, xiii. 31. ‡ Luke, iii. 1.

to have been his views and designs in this proceeding. On the other hand, the greatest injustice lay concealed under this political prudence. For Pilate thus delivered up an innocent and righteous person, whom it was his duty not only to acquit, but to protect against the rage and malice of his enemies. He sent the blessed Jesus to a judge, who, it was well known had before sought his life, and who had rendered himself odious to all good men, by the scandalous and unjust execution of John the Baptist. * On this account, the accusers of the Lord Jesus desired nothing more, than to be referred to Herod; being persuaded, that it would be no difficult matter to obtain his order for putting Jesus to death. We may deduce the following truths.

First, The enemies of true piety deal with the members of Christ, as they formerly did with the Head. As our blessed Saviour's enemies were continually repeating their former accusations dressed in a new garb, so it is still the way of persecutors and opposers of the truth to renew old calumnies which have long since been refuted by the most convincing apologies, and to send them forth into the world under a new form. As the accusers of Christ charged him before the governor with moving seditions and tumults, so at present, designing men infuse into those in power a bad opinion of the good and virtuous. They represent them as wanting in due respect to the sovereign, speaking evil of dignities, and endeavouring to introduce a new system of religion. And as the enemies of our Saviour mingled some truths with their false accusations, (as, for instance, that Jesus began to teach

* See Josephus's Antiquities, Book 18, c. 7.

in Galilee,) but perverted those truths to a bad purpose; so likewise many things are erroneously laid to the charge of the faithful servants of God, as pernicious consequences arising from the opinions which they really profess; consequences which they wholly disavow; and conclusions which never entered into their thoughts. By this conformity between the ancient and modern opposers of truth, we see that the scene continues much the same to this day, though the persons who act in it are changed.

Secondly, God conducted these incidents so as to accomplish his decrees. For by the sending of Jesus to Herod was fulfilled that prophecy concerning the Messiah, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against the Messiah, or his anointed." * And by this circumstance, Christ's innocence became still more conspicuous.

II.

We now come to consider the sufferings and indignities which Jesus endured before Herod. Our blessed Lord had already suffered much. He had been led about the city in bonds, reviled and insulted, and had been brought in that manner from Pilate to Herod. His sufferings before Herod consisted in the following particulars.

1. In the disadvantageous opinion which Herod conceived of him. This profligate prince looked on our Saviour as a sorcerer, who performed surprising wonders by his skill in magic. He was exceeding glad when he was informed, that the famous magician,

* Psalms, ii. 2.; Acts, iv. 27.

of whom he had already heard such strange things, was to be brought before him. He expected to be entertained with the sight of some wonderful performances. To hear the pure doctrine of the blessed Jesus, and to be instructed by him how to live in temperance, righteousness, and holiness, was no part of Herod's desire: his impatience to see Jesus arose from a persuasion, that our Lord would readily exhibit some surprising specimens of his art before a person of his high rank, in order to gain his favour, as a means for his deliverance. That such mistaken and unworthy ideas should be entertained of our Saviour's character, is to be reckoned a part of his sufferings. How deep was the abasement of the Son of the Most High! As afterwards he was crucified between two thieves, and was numbered among the transgressors, so here he suffers himself to be reckoned among sorcerers and magicians, that he might open a way to grace and repentance for the most deluded engines of Satan.

2. The sufferings of Christ before Herod further consisted in many unnecessary, curious, and contemptuous questions, which were put to him. We are told by St. Luke, that Herod "questioned him in many words:" the purport of which questions, the evangelist has not specified, but they may be presumed to have been suitable to his expectations of seeing Jesus perform some magical wonders. How sensibly must our blessed Lord have been grieved by so many vain, idle, or sarcastical questions; at a time when he was taken up with the most important thoughts, of reconciling heaven and earth, and, by the shedding of his precious blood, of establishing

everlasting peace between God and man! He therefore neither returned any answer to Herod's questions, nor gratified his culpable curiosity by any signs or wonders. He would not cast pearls before swine, nor use his divine power of working miracles to entertain the eyes of a contemptuous scoffer.

3. Our Saviour's sufferings consisted also in the violent accusations of his adversaries. It is said by the evangelist, "the chief priests and scribes stood, and vehemently accused him." They bent the bow of malice to its utmost stretch, and consulted to set forth their accusations in the most probable, as well as the most virulent manner.

Lastly, The sufferings of Christ before Herod consisted in many barbarous insults and mockeries. "Herod and his men of war," as the evangelist informs us, "set him at nought and mocked him; and having arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, sent him again to Pilate." Herod resented our blessed Lord's silence; looking upon it as a contempt of his dignity, that he would not return an answer to the many questions he had asked him; and therefore was determined to make Jesus feel the weight of his displeasure, and mocked and abused him in a barbarous and inhuman manner. He not only insulted him with contumelious words, and opprobrious names, but ordered a gorgeous or white robe * to be put on him, as a mock ensign of royalty. In this garb he was first presented to Herod's court as a laughing-stock, and then sent back through the streets of Jerusalem to Pilate.

A white garment, indeed, was no reproach to the blessed Jesus. He was the pure, unspotted Lamb

* Εσθητα λαμπραν, *vestem splendidam, claram.*

of God, who was clear from all guilt; which Herod undesignedly acknowledged by this mockery. He was the Prince of Peace, the antitype of the high-priest of the Jewish church, who, on the great day of atonement, went into the Holy of Holies, clothed in a white vestment. But of these mysteries, Herod was ignorant: and this white robe was put on Jesus amidst the laughter and mockery of Herod and his soldiers.

The evangelist adds, that "Pilate and Herod were the same day made friends together, though before, they were at enmity between themselves." They had been more particularly inveterate against each other, since Pilate had caused some of Herod's subjects to be barbarously massacred at Jerusalem. Christ was to be the pledge of reconciliation, and the means of renewing the friendship between these personages. Thus when Christ and his interest are to be opposed, the spirit of persecution declares itself indiscriminately in all ranks and degrees. At the same time an intimation may be here given, that through this same Jesus, the enmity between Jews and Gentiles should be abolished, (Pilate being a Gentile, and Herod a Jew,) and the peace, which had been interrupted, restored.

From Herod's treatment of our blessed Lord, we may learn,

That the great ones of this world are apt to take offence at the abasement of Christ, and the simplicity and plainness of the Christian religion. This consideration should move us to be fervent in our prayers for all men, and especially for kings and rulers, that divine grace may preserve them from stumbling at this corner stone which God hath laid in Sion, and from taking offence at the simplicity of the gospel.

It should also check our desires after high stations, and teach us to rest contented in humbler circumstances, in which we are less liable to take offence at the reproach of Christ, and the humbling, but salutary doctrines of his religion.

PRAYER.

Blessed be thy name, O heavenly Father, for giving up thy beloved Son to mockery, insult, and contempt for our sakes. Grant, O Lord Jesus, that every one of us may, in the conduct of thine enemies, see the image of his own depravity, and own with shame and sorrow, that he has in his heart the latent seeds of all those corrupt dispositions which appeared in them; that so we may humble ourselves before thee, and earnestly seek the forgiveness of our sins, by the merit of the reproaches and sufferings, the bonds and indignities, which thou didst endure! Amen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE UNJUST METHOD TAKEN BY PILATE FOR EFFECTING OUR LORD'S RELEASE.

" *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests*
" *and rulers, and the people, said unto them, Ye have*
" *brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the*
" *people: and behold, I having examined him before*
" *you, have found no fault in this man, touching those*
" *things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod:*
" *for I sent you to him, and lo! nothing worthy of death*
" *is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him and*
" *and release him. Now at the feast of the Passover,*
" *the governor was wont to release unto the people a*
" *prisoner, whom they would. Therefore, of necessity*
" *he must release one unto them at the feast. And there*
" *was one named Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, who*
" *lay bound with them that made insurrection with him,*
" *who had committed murder in the insurrection.*"

PILATE had already begun to deviate from the course of justice, by sending to Herod the Lord Jesus, of whose innocence he was perfectly convinced, with a view of extricating himself out of his embarrassment. But divine Providence disappointed this contrivance; for Herod sent Jesus back to him; and Pilate had now to try a new expedient. He began by making another public declaration of our Saviour's innocence. To this end, he not only summoned the chief priests and elders, but likewise the people who stood before his judgment-hall. It is probable, that by thus solemnly declaring Christ's innocence, Pilate supposed he should at least work on the populace, so that they

would insist on his release. Let us listen to this public testimony of our Redeemer's innocence. We may observe in it these particulars.

1. Pilate summarily repeats the charge, which the chief priests and elders had preferred against Jesus. "You have brought this man to me as one that perverteth the people."

2. He expressly asserts, that Christ was innocent: "I find no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him."

3. He confirms his assertion by appealing to his own examination of Jesus: "Behold, I have examined him before you," i. e. 'I have questioned him, inquired into his case, compared his confession with your charge, and the depositions of your witnesses, and done every thing which could be expected from an impartial judge. And as by the Roman law the opposite parties are to be confronted,* I have acted agreeably to this, and have examined him before you. Would you but speak the truth, you must own, that you cannot prove the man guilty of those crimes of which you accuse him.'

4. He appeals to Herod's judgment, adding, "No nor yet Herod." 'Herod has not found him guilty of any crime:' "for I sent you to him, and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him." 'I did not acquaint him with my opinion of the man's innocence; but left the whole to him. You yourselves were there, and doubtless did not fail to urge your accusation. But he has been found guilty of nothing worthy of death. You cannot but acquiesce in the judgment of Herod, who is of your own religion,

* Acts, xxv. 16.

and sovereign of Galilee, where you pretend this man has been most busy in sowing sedition. If this were true, Herod, as the ruler of his country, must have had the best information.' Such was Pilate's testimony of our blessed Saviour's innocence; from which we shall deduce the following truths.

1. As the innocence of Jesus Christ was to be imputed to Jews and Gentiles at the divine tribunal, so it was here made manifest at the tribunals of both.

The perfect innocence of our blessed Saviour was the means of reconciling guilty man to God. Now, as the whole human race, until the incarnation of Christ, had been divided into Jews and Gentiles, the testimony of his innocence was to be corroborated by the unanimous consent of both. Pilate was a Gentile, Herod a Jew. Both, though they differed widely in their religion and politics, though they were at open enmity with each other, yet agreed in this, that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. Indeed, the innocence of Christ was infinitely beyond what his judges could possibly conceive. He was not only free from any crimes punishable with death, but there was not the least shadow of guilt in him. For, as St. Paul observes, "Such a High-Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."* It was sufficient, according to human laws, that he was acquitted of the charge brought against him. But notwithstanding, he was afterwards sentenced to die. The cause of his death lay not in himself, but in us. O that we may be truly sensible, that our transgressions

* Heb. vii. 26.

were the cause: that we laid the foundation of the sentence, which God pronounced against his Son.

2. Charity requires that we should clear our neighbour when he is slandered, and bear witness to his innocence. As Christians we are bound to love our neighbour as ourselves; and as we are sufficiently ready to justify our own innocence, when aspersed by calumnies, and malicious reports, it is equally our duty to be concerned for the character of our neighbour, and, as much as in us lies, to protect it from injury. In the instance before us, Pilate publicly clears our blessed Saviour's character before all the people, and contradicts the rulers of the Jewish nation, who charged him with being a malefactor. This heathen governor therefore, will rise up in judgment against many Christians, who have behaved very differently towards the members of Christ. Many, though convinced of the innocence of those servants of Christ, whom the world asperses, yet will not venture to speak a single word in their defence, from a pusillanimous fear of being suspected of connexion with them. Others, still more culpable, are so far from taking the part of innocence, that they join in loading it with calumnies.

Pilate, having publicly borne witness to the innocence of the blessed Jesus, makes use of two unwarrantable expedients, in order to procure his release. Had he acted agreeably to the conviction of his conscience, he would have discharged our Lord, notwithstanding the accusations of the chief priests; and would have resolutely protected him against their rage. But abject fear, and worldly policy, induced him to attempt his point by craft, that he might not make the chief priests his enemies by an open

affront. For this purpose he makes two proposals to them.

The first proposal was to chastise Jesus, and let him go. The rules of justice required, that he should discharge the innocent; but to offer to scourge him, was great injustice. If Jesus were guilty, why release him? if innocent, why scourge him? But Pilate would satisfy his conscience, and yet humour the inveterate hatred of the Jews against Jesus, as well as support the reputation of his accusers: he therefore proposed to scourge him, that it might not be thought he was found entirely innocent. This he concluded to be the best expedient, for paying some regard to justice, and yet saving the credit of the chief priests and elders; who might justify themselves to the people, by representing that Jesus had been found guilty, though Pilate out of clemency was pleased to spare his life.—Besides, he hoped, that the chief priests would the rather be contented with this proceeding, since by scourging, which was an ignominious punishment inflicted only on slaves, Jesus would be rendered contemptible, would lose his credit with the people, and be deserted by his adherents. But God directed this circumstance contrary to the intention of Pilate, that the innocence of the blessed Jesus might appear with the greater lustre.

In Pilate's second proposal, he unwarrantably put the Lord Jesus on the same footing with Barabbas, a notorious malefactor; and offered the people the privilege of choosing which of the two they would have released. This scheme was the more likely to succeed, as it put it in the power of the people to release Jesus. Many of them had received ex-

traordinary benefits from him, and they were in general more favourably disposed towards him than the chief priests and elders. This subtil politician knew that the chief priests had delivered him out of envy; and he therefore concluded that with them nothing was to be done; since it was their object to destroy Jesus, whose doctrines had exposed their vices and hypocrisy.

His proposal was in conformity with an established custom. "At the feast of the Passover, the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner whom they would. Therefore, of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast." It is somewhat dubious, whether this custom was introduced by the Jews, or by the Romans. From the passage in St. John, "Ye have a custom that I should release one unto you at the Passover," some conjecture, that it was of Jewish origin, in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, of which the feast of the Passover was a commemoration; and that the Romans, after subduing Judea, had indulged the Jews in the continuance of this custom. Others are of opinion, that this custom was introduced by the Romans, as a favour to the Jews, who resorted to Jerusalem from all parts of the world at the Passover, that they might meet in good temper, and be less liable to revolt against the Roman government. As the custom had been established, the Jews were tenacious of it; and therefore Pilate, to prevent any disturbance, must release to them a prisoner.

The criminal, whom Pilate put in competition with Jesus, deserves our notice; he is thus described: "And there was at that time one named Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, who lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him; who had committed

murder in the insurrection." Two of his crimes are here specified, namely sedition and murder, both which rendered him utterly unworthy of any favour or intercession. Pilate had also at that time other prisoners, (since two other malefactors were crucified with Jesus,) but he selected this notorious offender, flattering himself that the people would never sue for the discharge of such a wretch; since a man-slayer, according to their law, was to die without mercy. The chief priests and elders, Pilate did not imagine, would so far disgrace themselves, as to intercede for a rebel and a murderer.—From what has been here said, we may deduce these truths.

First, Christ, by this circumstance of his passion, was to expiate the sin of those who act contrary to their convictions, either to gratify their own passions, or to please others.

Secondly, It is dangerous to commit the least act of injustice. Pilate was ready to scourge an innocent man, though he was unwilling to put him to death. Afterwards, for want of the firmness becoming his office, he was led to commit the greater act of injustice, which he was for preventing by doing the smaller. To contend for the commission of a small sin, in order to prevent a greater, is false and dangerous reasoning. A Christian will choose to lay down his life rather than offend his Saviour by the deliberate commission of any sin. The Lord give us this resolution, and so establish and strengthen it, that the gates of hell may never prevail against us.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living Saviour, praised be thy name for condescending to permit thy sacred person

to be rejected by the Jewish nation, and a murderer to be preferred before thee. May we with grateful hearts acknowledge the benefits thus derived to us; and may we be constrained by this instance of thy love, willingly to renounce the evil customs of the world, and all those sins which brought thee to such an abyss of suffering. Grant this for the sake of those sufferings which thou didst endure for us. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDERER BARABBAS PREFERRED TO THE LORD JESUS.

"And when they were gathered together, Pilate saith unto "them, Ye have a custom, that I should release unto you "one at the Passover. Then the multitude crying aloud, "began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto "them. But Pilate answered them saying, Whom will "ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who "is called Christ? Will ye that I release unto you the "king of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests "had delivered him for envy. And when he was set "down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, "saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; "for I have suffered many things this day in a dream "because of him. But the chief priests and elders per- "suaded and moved the multitude, that they should ask "Barabbas and destroy Jesus. Then cried they all at "once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto "us Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a robber."

In the last chapter we observed, how Pilate had recourse to various expedients for promoting the re-

lease of our Lord; how he put it to the people's choice, whether they would have Jesus released, or Barabbas, a notorious rebel and murderer; hoping that the multitude would prefer our blessed Saviour to that atrocious criminal. But the event was contrary to Pilate's expection, as will appear from that part of the history of our Saviour's passion now to be considered.

1. We have a proposal on the part of Pilate. The Jews being gathered together, Pilate said unto them, "Ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the Passover." Pilate was no stranger to the zealous adherence of the Jews to the customs transmitted to them from their ancestors.

2. Hereupon followed what St. Mark relates of the people; according to some copies in these words: "And the multitude went up:" i. e. they drew nearer to Pilate's house. In other copies of the Greek text, the words are, "The multitude cried aloud"*—and "began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them." The minds of the people seem to have been hitherto so much occupied with the proceedings against Jesus of Nazareth, that they never thought of their customary privilege; nor had they claimed it of the governor. But when they were reminded of it by Pilate himself, their desire that this ancient custom should be observed, appeared with great force, and broke out into tumultuous outcries, demanding that their customs and privileges might not suffer any prejudice.

We come, in the next place, to consider the conduct

* It is thus rendered in our translation, according to the printed Greek text, and most of the manuscript copies.

of Pilate. He put this question to the people. "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ? Will ye that I release unto you the king of the Jews?" Never were two persons of characters so different, placed on the same footing. one, the eternal Son of God, a pattern of innocence and holiness, and the other a robber and murderer.

This scheme of Pilate's seems well concerted. He confines their choice to two persons; Jesus, whom he knew to be innocent, and who, by healing the sick and raising the dead, had endeared himself to the people; and an infamous malefactor, who had committed murder, shed innocent blood, and had been taken in the very act of rebellion. By this contrivance he also in some measure took the affair out of the hands of the chief priests, who had delivered Jesus for envy, and he placed it in the power of the people, among whom he knew that our Lord had not a few disciples and adherents.

In his address to the people he gave our Saviour such names or titles, as might recommend him to their favour. His words are, "Jesus," of whom it is said he is, or who is called, "Christ," i. e. the Messiah whom ye have so long expected. He likewise entitles him, "the king of the Jews," reminding them how a few days before, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, they had with shouts and acclamations proclaimed him king of Israel.

By putting a rebel in competition with Christ, Pilate was in hopes that the chief priests would be deterred from interfering for Barabbas, who had been taken in the act of sedition: since by declaring for him, and advising the people to procure his release, they must incur a suspicion of favouring his seditious

designs.—Still however in these schemes of Pilate, there was a great mixture of injustice. For he thus exposed and hazarded the life of a person of whose innocence he was convinced; and delivered him up to the caprice of the populace. "He knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy." Ought he not to have considered the great influence which they possessed over the people?

Pilate by this action, precluded himself from urging with effect any thing in favour of Christ's innocence, after having born a public testimony to it. When the Jews had once desired Barabbas to be released to them, Jesus stood actually condemned, and rejected by the majority of the people. Hence we see the danger of consulting the opinions of men in dubious cases, without regard to the divine will. Pilate asks the people, Will ye that I release unto you Barabbas, or Jesus? Whereas he ought to have acted according to the laws, and the dictates of his own conscience: both which would have informed him that the innocent ought to be released.—By these circumstances of his passion, our Lord has expiated that pusillanimity which from a desire of worldly favour, gives up the cause of Christ and his members to the will of a licentious populace, from whom no justice is to be expected. Thus too he has atoned for the sin of acting contrary to conviction; and of conforming to popular opinion, and the corrupt taste of the times, rather than to the dictates of conscience. As these sins contributed to aggravate the sufferings of Jesus, they should excite our detestation.

We are further to observe an intimation from heaven to Pilate. St. Matthew relates it thus: "When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto

him, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Thus Pilate received an admonition from a quarter in which he could not suspect prejudice or partiality. This dream appears to be a divine intimation to him, when he was on the point of committing the most flagrant act of injustice.—We may observe, that the intimations given in dreams, are neither to be totally disregarded, nor absolutely credited. It behoves us on the one hand, not to be hasty and credulous, or to be open to every representation of fancy; nor, on the other, wholly to reject impressions which may convey some secret intimation from providence.

Lastly, We are to consider the effect of this proposal of Pilate on the chief priests and people.

The chief priests and elders urged the people to require that Barabbas should be released, and Jesus be put to death. On the common people, who had hitherto been better affected to Christ than the chief priests and scribes, their misrepresentations produced the intended effect, so that the whole multitude cried aloud, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas." What a spectacle was this, that the prince of life should be rejected, and a murderer released! How wonderful was the wise appointment of God, that the Son of his love should become the object of universal hatred, that he might regain for us that love which we had unhappily forfeited! We shall conclude with the following observations.

1. During the persecutions of Christ and his members, the sentiments and inclinations of mankind are discovered. By this competition between Christ and

Barabbas, were laid open the latent corruptions of the human heart. The chief priests had accused Jesus of stirring up the people; but it is here said of them, that they "moved the people." Their misrepresentations were the winds which stirred up the sea of popular rage. This is still the way of artful men. They cry out against sedition, but are the first to raise disturbances, if they can thus compass any sinister end. By the instance before us, we may likewise see what an unsteady reed is popular applause, and how easily shaken; how little the acclamations and applauses of mankind are to be relied on; how uncertain their approbation, how precarious their favour, how variable their inclinations, how short-lived their gratitude. Hence also we learn what the world in general is, which could prefer a flagitious murderer to the prince of life.

2. Jesus Christ is still rejected among Christians. Though our ears do not hear those dreadful words, "Away with Jesus," yet many thousands prefer Barabbas to him; for as often as we obey our sinful lusts instead of the commands of our Saviour, and fulfil the former, while we postpone the latter, we hold with Barabbas, and reject Jesus. The cry of all the proud and ambitious is, 'Away with this Jesus, who would have us sacrifice our honour to his!' The cry of the voluptuous is, 'Away with this Jesus, who would have us renounce the pleasures of this world, to take up our cross, and mortify the flesh!' The cry of the whole multitude of the covetous is, 'Away with this Jesus, who would have us renounce our mammon, and devote our substance to his services: we will follow no such leader.' On every allurement to sin, Christ and Satan stand in competition: the former

admonishes, the latter entices; Christ enjoins, Satan forbids. If we give way to the temptation, we side with Satan, who was a rebel and murderer from the beginning, and reject the blessed Jesus. Every one who will not submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and obey his precepts, rejects him, and makes choice of Barabbas. Every one who delights in and countenances vice, and suppresses true religion and virtue, every one who persecutes the godly, and connives at the impiety of the wicked, (especially when they are persons of rank, or protected by men of power) rejects Jesus, and prefers Barabbas. If we are guilty of this dreadful sin, we shall be rejected by Christ when he comes in the glory of the Father at the last day.

3. The disciples of Christ are not to expect better treatment from the world, than their Lord and master met with. As the whole multitude cried out, "Away with him; give us Barabbas;" so likewise they cried out against St. Paul:* and the same outcry was repeated afterwards against the primitive Christians; "Away," said their persecutors, "with these Atheists!"† because they would not acknowledge the idols of the heathen to be Gods. How often is the name of the saints traduced as evil! But Christ says, "Blessed are ye when men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake!"‡ We are not therefore to take offence when this happens to other faithful servants of God; nor are we to think it strange, when we see every thing dark and tempestuous around us, and when the world casts out our names as evil.

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* Acts, xxi. 36.

† Αιρε τους ἀθεους. See Polycarp's Epistle to the Church of Smyrna.

‡ Luke, vi. 22.

Happy are we when this comes upon us for Christ's sake! It is infinitely better to be rejected by the world in fellowship with Christ, than to enjoy its esteem, love, and applause for a season, and afterwards to hear these dreadful words proceed out of the mouth of our Judge: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." *

PRAYER.

We thank thee, O Lord, for this part of thy sufferings which we have now considered. Grant that by these reflections we may be filled with hatred of sin, and excited to a cordial love of thee. Preserve us from rejecting thee, and from preferring the service of Satan to the fellowship of thy sufferings. Give us by thy spirit, the will and ability constantly to reject the evil and choose the good, to bear thy reproach, to take upon us thy cross, and willingly to submit to be rejected with thee, by the world, that we may be acknowledged by thee before thy Father and his holy angels. Grant this for the sake of thy meritorious sufferings. Amen.

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* Matt. vii. 23.

CHAPTER X

PILATE'S FRUITLESS ENDEAVOURS TO RELEASE THE LORD JESUS.

"*Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, saith again*
"*unto them, What will ye then that I should do with*
"*Jesus, who is called Christ; whom ye call the king*
"*of the Jews? And they all cried out, Crucify him!*
"*Crucify him! And he said unto them again the third*
"*time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found*
"*no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him,*
"*and let him go. But they cried out the more exceed-*
"*ingly, Let him be crucified! And they were instant*
"*with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified:*
"*and the voices of them, and of the chief priests pre-*
"*vailed. And so Pilate, willing to content the people,*
"*gave sentence that it should be as they required. And*
"*he released unto them him that for sedition and murder*
"*had been cast into prison, whom they had desired; but*
"*he delivered Jesus unto their will.*"

PILATE'S intention is intimated by St. Luke in these words: "Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus." It would have been more agreeable to Pilate, if the people by their own choice had declared for Jesus. But when contrary to his expectations, the repeated cry of the multitude was, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas," he still, for a time, adhered to his first purpose of endeavouring to procure our Lord's discharge. Had he been truly in earnest in his designs, he would have proceeded according to law, and made use of his judicial power. For

he afterwards boasts of his authority, when he says to Jesus, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee." But Pilate was wavering and irresolute. He was unwilling to condemn an innocent person; but at the same time wished to be on good terms with his accusers, that he might not incur their resentment. He obstructed the execution of his own purpose, by transferring his power into the hands of the people; and betrayed the cause of innocence and justice, by leaving it to the option of a tumultuous mob, whether they would have the innocent Jesus released, or the rebel and murderer Barabbas. Wishing to release Jesus, he said to the people, "What will ye that I shall do with Jesus who is called Christ, and whom ye call the king of the Jews?" He seems not unwilling to permit them to release two, instead of one at the Passover, if they would but give him the least intimation of their assent. He might imagine that the Jews, who were so tenacious of their privileges, would have eagerly embraced this opportunity of enlarging them, by interceding for the discharge of Jesus of Nazareth. He also mentioned Jesus by such titles as might influence the people in his favour. He styles him "Christ," and "king of the Jews." As if he had said, 'The other day, at his entry into Jerusalem, you publicly proclaimed him to be a king. Consider therefore, that it will little redound to your honour to suffer him to be crucified as a slave.' But it appeared by the event, what little effect his representation had on an inflamed, outrageous multitude: the people immediately cried out with one voice, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Hereupon Pilate again bears witness to the innocence

of Jesus; "What evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him." As if he had said, 'It is not a sufficient reason for me to order Jesus to be crucified, that you cry out crucify him! He must have been found guilty of some crime, deserving of such a painful and infamous death. Now I have not found any such crime in him; and you yourselves have not been able to prove him guilty. If you have any thing to urge, speak out; I am ready to enter on a fresh examination. What evil hath he done? All which has hitherto been alleged against him, does not amount to a capital crime.' Pilate then proposes an expedient by way of compromise. "I will therefore chastise him, and let him go." How unjust this proceeding was, has been already shown.

We find, however, in the behaviour of Pilate, some things to commend. In his repeated remonstrances to the people, to preserve the life of the innocent Jesus, he is a pattern to us, who should stand up in behalf of God's injured honour, and the welfare of our neighbour. We should spare no pains, avoid no labour, but risk all the storms which malice can raise against us, when engaged in so good a cause. Pilate's question, "What evil hath he done?" is commendable and worthy of imitation. If this question were put on proper occasions, many persons wrongfully defamed would be vindicated; the mouth of malice would be stopped, infamous calumnies discouraged, and many scandalous falsities against good men would no longer be propagated. But though Pilate on this occasion did something which may put to shame many who call themselves Christians, yet we must admit, that he only opposed the rage of the multitude in words, without making use of the authority, which

God had put into his hands for delivering the innocent victim of popular rage. From the behaviour of Pilate therefore we may learn the following truths.

1. God has imprinted on the conscience of man, such an abhorrence of injustice, that the mind often makes a long resistance before it consents to violate that principle. Corrupt as our nature is by the fall, natural conscience holds out for a time, before it suffers itself entirely to be overcome. But by habit the conscience becomes inured to sin, and the abhorrence of evil gradually wears off. By opposing this divine principle, we act in opposition to God himself, and incur the dreadful judgment of an obdurate insensibility.

2. The greater opposition a man has met with in committing any sin, the greater is the guilt he incurs in the commission. The chief priests had many difficulties to contend with, before they compassed their design. Pilate, for a long time, opposed them: and it must have cost them no small pains, before they could bring over the people to a compliance. Accordingly, St. Peter says to the Jews, "Ye denied Jesus in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. Ye denied the Holy One, and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted to you."* St. Luke enumerates the impediments which God threw in the way of the Jews to divert them from this horrid injustice. "And Pilate said a third time, why, what evil hath he done." Thus all the obstructions, which were placed in a sinner's way, to prevent the perpetration of any crime, are registered in God's book of remembrance, and there charged to his account.

* Acts, iii. 13, 14.

God often arrests sinners in their progress, (as formerly the angel of the Lord met Balaam, with a flaming sword,) with dreadful threatenings and agonies of mind. He not only gives them warnings of conscience, but throws in their way many obstacles to the accomplishment of their purposes, which they cannot overcome without great struggles. When a man, notwithstanding all these obstacles, breaks through the bounds by which God would have restrained him, and like a headstrong horse, throws off the reins, it is a guilt of the deepest die. It behoves every one of us to examine himself, whether he has thus sinned against God, and the gracious warnings of his spirit.

Secondly, We come to consider the manner in which the Jews prevailed over Pilate: and this was by a tumultuous outcry of the multitude assembled around his house. Not being able to produce a single fault of which they can accuse our blessed Lord, with any appearance of truth, they have nothing to urge, but a repetition of their senseless clamour; Crucify him! crucify him! Pilate's proposal of chastising Jesus and letting him go, they take no notice of; but insist on his crucifixion. Whatever unsteadiness Pilate might show on this occasion, the Jews immoveably persisted in their purpose. The outcry grew so loud, that the evangelist can scarcely find words to express the impetuosity of it. "They were instant with loud voices." As the judge, instead of the firmness becoming his office, began to waver and give way to their clamours, they became more bold and urgent in their demands; and since they had no proofs to adduce of our Saviour's guilt, they made up that deficiency by the vehemence of

their voices. It is added, "requiring that he might be crucified." They now no longer made use of a submissive request, but assumed to themselves the authority of dictating to the governor, and peremptorily insisted on his compliance. "And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed." Hence it appears, that the hoary chiefs of the Jewish people were not ashamed to join in one tumultuous cry with the rude populace. The voices of the people and of the chief priests combined, prevailed over Pilate's irresolution and timidity. Here was fulfilled the prophecy in the Psalms, where the Messiah complains of this outrageous multitude, "they gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion." * Thus we see that sin is of such a nature, that the more it is indulged, the more violently it rages. The more Pilate represented to the Jews the innocence of Jesus, the more vehemently did they cry, Crucify him!—How should it humble every one of us to think, that by nature he has within him the hidden seeds of this hatred of goodness. If he has not been carried to the same excess, it is owing not to his own caution and prudence only, but to the grace of God, which has hitherto kept him from such occasions of sin.

Pilate at length, after an ineffectual resistance, yields to the will of the people. He pronounced sentence that Jesus should be crucified, and discharged Barabbas.—The condemnation of the Lord Jesus, and the releasing of Barabbas, may serve to illustrate our freedom and release by the condemnation of Christ. Barabbas represents the first Adam and his sinful

* Psalms, xxii. 13.

progeny. As this Barabbas was a rebel, so likewise was Adam; and in him all mankind were guilty of rebellion against God. As Barabbas was a murderer, so Adam, as it were, murdered all his posterity, by subjecting them to the sentence of temporal and eternal death. As Barabbas had hitherto lain in bonds and chains; so the whole human race naturally lies captive under the power of Satan, and bound with the chains of sin. Moreover on Adam and his posterity the sentence was denounced, and was to have been executed, "on the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,"—not only a temporal, but an eternal death. But as Barabbas is here exchanged for Jesus; as the former is set at liberty, and the latter crucified; so is the first Adam with all his descendants exchanged for the second Adam who stood in his stead. He is sentenced to death, and they are discharged. This is the incomprehensible mystery of divine love, in which justice and mercy have kissed each other, and joined in harmony. Justice is satisfied; since the sentence which it had pronounced is executed, yet not on the sinner, but on the Surety. Mercy receives the sinner into favour, and sets him at liberty; since the Surety has permitted the sentence of death to be executed on himself. O miracle of love, which it becomes us humbly to admire, and gratefully to adore! How can we sufficiently praise our merciful Saviour for thus standing as a victim in our stead, and submitting to be sentenced to death amidst the outcries of an outrageous multitude!—But let us be careful that we do not repeat the crime of the impious Jews. We have within us a Barabbas; "the old man," who is a rebel against the divine majesty, and a transgressor of his commands,

and therefore deserves to be crucified. Far be it from us, that by suffering him to live, we should crucify the Son of God afresh. Far be it from us, to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, and to suppress the motions of the spirit. May the Lord of all mercy ever preserve us from treading in these footsteps of Pilate and the Jews! Amen.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living Saviour! blessed be thy holy name for standing as a victim in our stead, and submitting to be condemned to die, that we might be acquitted. We adore thy stupendous love, and beseech thee, to make us partakers of all the salutary fruits of it. May it unite us the more cordially to love thee, and to order our lives according to thy good pleasure. May we, by godly sorrow and repentance, mortify the old man, as already condemned with thee; that he may never recover his dominion, but that thy Holy Spirit may live and dwell in us: and thus mayest thou take pleasure in us as thy redeemed, and finally receive us into the mansions of glory. Amen.

CHAPTER X.

THE INDIGNITIES WHICH THE LORD JESUS SUFFERED IN PILATE'S JUDGMENT-HALL.

"*Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him. And "the soldiers of the governor led Jesus away into the "common-hall, and they called together the whole band. "And they stripped him, and clothed him in a purple "robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, "they put it about his head, and a reed in his right "hand; and they mocked him and began to salute him, "saying, Hail, King of the Jews. And they spit upon "him, and took the reed and smote him upon the head; "and bowed the knee, and worshipped him: and they "smote him with their hands.*"

HITHERTO our Saviour since he had been led to the governor's house, was free from any rude insults. Pilate had laboured to deliver him out of the hands of his blood-thirsty enemies. He had given testimony to his innocence by repeated declarations, and though he had proposed to chastise Jesus, and let him go, no violence had as yet been offered to him. But a more cruel, bloody scene now presents itself, where the Son of God is left in the hands of savage and merciless soldiers. Let us attentively consider the painful and contemptuous indignities offered to the Lord of glory. Let us see what good effect the consideration may produce in a soul, possessed with real love and affection for his crucified Saviour.

The painful indignities which our Saviour endured,

were, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the rude blows of the soldiers.

The scourging is thus noticed by St. John: "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him." He had before said to the Jews, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law;" but as the Jews had declined this, it is afterwards said, "Then Pilate took Jesus." Pilate would never have been permitted thus to act, had it not been for our sins, and the love which our heavenly Father manifested to the human race in delivering up his Son for us all. Thanks be to thee, O heavenly Father, who, for our salvation, hast sent thy beloved Son, and given him up to be reviled, insulted, and put to death! Thanks be to thee, O Son of the Father, who didst permit thyself to be led away, when by the least exertion of thy Almighty Power, thou couldst have easily prevented it. O thou most precious gift of heaven, grant, that in humble faith and pure love, we may lay hold on thee as our salvation. Grant that all who have received thee in faith may diligently keep thy commandments, and walk worthy of thy gospel.

When Pilate had taken our Saviour, he scourged him; i. e. by the hands of the soldiers to whom he delivered him. The Lord Jesus was beaten, not only with rods, which were reckoned least ignominious by the Romans; but with thongs or cords, a punishment peculiar to the meanest slaves; especially those who were sentenced to be crucified. For this end, the criminal was not laid on the ground, and stretched out as among the Jews; but stood with his hands bound, and fastened to a post or pillar, so that both the breast and back were exposed. Then the soldiers appointed to execute this punishment, scourged his naked body

with thongs, to the ends of which pieces of iron-wires were sometimes tacked. God had expressly commanded the Jews, that they should not give a malefactor more than forty stripes; but amongst the Romans the number was not limited, and varied according to the crimes of the malefactor, and the discretion of the judge. It is not to be doubted that the soldiers inflicted this punishment with the utmost severity, * for they had no orders to spare the body of the Lord Jesus. On the contrary, Pilate might possibly direct that this scourging (which usually preceded crucifixion) should be unusually severe, that the sight of the lacerated body of Jesus might move the Jews to pity the prisoner, and to desist from opposing his release. This appears the more probable, as our Saviour was so enfeebled by this scourging, that afterwards he had not strength enough to drag his cross to the place of execution. Thus, O my Saviour, thy own prophecy, "They shall scourge the Son of Man," † was fulfilled: thus was accomplished what thou didst foretel by the mouth of the prophet: "I gave my back to the smiters." ‡ O blessed Redeemer, why didst thou thus expose thy sacred person? It was I that deserved to have received these stripes, and to have felt the scourge of divine wrath to all eternity. But thou, O merciful Son of the Father, didst stand in the stead of thy guilty servant, and receivedst the strokes which were due to my sins. Praised be thy name for the stripes

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* Qua sævitia olim Romani in flagellationes usi sint, ex loco Eusebii colligi protest, Hist. Eccles. Lib. IV. c. 15. Obstupescebant omnes qui aderant, quum illos viderent partim flagris ad intimas usque venas et arterias lanintos, adeo ut corporis membra penitus recondita et viscera ipsa conspectui paterent.

† Luke, xviii. 32. ‡ Isaiah, l. 6.

thou didst receive; and for the blood, which was shed by the scourges of the inhuman soldiers! This thy heavenly Father hath appointed to be a fountain for sin and uncleanness. Whenever I am tempted to sin, let me think on these sufferings till my eyes run down with tears of repentance; and enable me daily to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.

The second painful insult offered to the Son of God, was the crowning him with thorns. The rage and cruelty of the soldiers were not satisfied by the bloody furrows which they had plowed on his back. They do not spare his sacred head, but make a wreath of thorns, and press it on his head, so that the points were forcibly pierced into his temples, and the blood ran down his face in purple streams.

Here a faithful soul may say, 'A fountain is opened to wash away the pollutions which I have contracted. It was the decree of my Creator, that, after the fall, the ground should bring forth thorns and thistles, as a token of the curse. Here I behold my Saviour crowned with thorns, and as it were, clothed in my curse, to procure me a blessing. Here I see the ram that was to be offered in my stead, caught in a thicket.* How amazing is thy love, O my Saviour! When a regal crown was offered to thee, thou didst fly from it; but thou didst willingly bow thy head under a crown of thorns, hereby confirming the testimony which thou hadst given, that thy kingdom is not of this world.'

The third indignity which our blessed Saviour endured, was the frequent blows on his face and head, which drove the thorns deeper into his temples.

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* Genesis, xxii. 13.

O, my Saviour, these insulting blows were to have fallen on me. It was I that should have suffered eternally under the buffetings of Satan; but thou, my blessed representative, didst take them upon thee. If therefore thou shouldest be pleased to afflict my body with painful sufferings, impart to me a measure of that patience which thou didst show on this occasion. I am ashamed of my impatience and want of courage, when I consider how many martyrs have for thy sake undergone the acutest pains, and most cruel tortures, not only with patience, but even with joy and triumph. Did they patiently suffer such inflictions for thy sake, O my Saviour, and am I so impatient, that I can scarcely bear an insulting look, or an opprobrious name? Strengthen me with thy Spirit, and arm me with courage and constancy, that I may be able, if called upon, to glorify thee, by trials and sufferings.

We now proceed to consider the contemptuous indignities which were offered to the Lamb of God. These were chiefly in derision of his kingly office. As his prophetical office had been ridiculed in the house of Caiaphas, by blind-folding him, striking him with the palms of their hands, and saying to him, "Prophesy unto us, who is it that smote thee;" so here in the house of the civil judge, his regal office is ridiculed, and his confession of his kingdom before Pilate made the subject of insulting mirth.

This profane mockery must have affected the blessed Saviour! If a pious Christian, who has a due esteem for the honour of God's word, is pierced to the heart when he hears divine truths abused by the tongues of scoffers, how must the soul of the blessed Jesus have been pained, at hearing these miscreants exercise their raillery on that sacred decree of his heavenly Father,

"I have set my King upon my holy hill of Sion." We may observe two circumstances which aggravated this mockery of our Lord.

First, It took place in the hall of judgment, the palace of the imperial governor. It gives a keener edge to abuse and injustice, when it is offered in a place where innocence ought to claim protection.

Secondly, The whole band of the Roman soldiers, which consisted of several hundreds, were assembled, for it is said, "they called together the whole band." How great must have been the outrages of a number of soldiers, instigated by the spirit of malice! The Roman soldiers were generally the most abandoned among the people. Was holy Job grieved that he should be mocked by those, whom he would have disdained to have set with the dogs of his flock?* How must it have affected the blessed Jesus, to be given up to the outrages of these soldiers! Yet, for our sake, the Son of Man was thus delivered into the hands of sinners.

O my Saviour, thy love to mankind must have been infinite, which could bring thee to undergo such numberless abuses, and horrid outrages for their sakes! Thanks be to thee, for humbling thyself so low, that we might be exalted. Praised be thy name, for suffering thyself to be reviled and insulted by the refuse of mankind, that we might be glorified with thy saints. Unfeigned thanks be to thee, for suffering thyself to be brought into the council of the ungodly, that we might be delivered from their company, and advanced to the assembly of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. Make us willing to submit for

* Job, xxx. 1.

thy sake to abuse and mockery. Arm us with patience, when the undiscerning world treats us with scorn and derision for the sake of the gospel. Thou hast sanctified reproach: grant that we may bear it with joy, and prefer it to the sinful pleasures and honours of the world.—Let us enumerate more particularly the instances of contemptuous treatment of the Lord Jesus.

1. It has already been remarked, that the soldiers, (instead of a crown of gold, or a wreath of laurel or ivy, which conquerors used to wear,) bound his sacred temples with a crown of thorns; this was not only, as already observed, extremely painful, but likewise implied a most severe mockery.

2. They put on him a purple vest, and a scarlet robe. Purple was a colour used by emperors and kings; and thus the soldiers intended an insult on the kingly dignity of our Saviour.

3. Instead of a sceptre, they put a reed in his hand; to denote, probably, that his kingdom, which St. Paul justly terms "a kingdom which cannot be moved,"* was weak and unstable; and that those who expected any protection from him, leaned on a broken reed.†

4. After the soldiers had thus dressed him up as a mock-king, they bowed the knee before him, pretending to do him homage. These mockeries were accompanied with taunting reflections, levelled at Christ's kingly dignity. As the Romans used to say to their emperors, Hail, Cæsar! so these scoffers, with ludicrous tone and gesture, cried out, "Hail, king of the Jews!"

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* Heb. xii. 28. † Isaiah, xxxvi. 6.

'I bless thee, O my Saviour,' may a pious Christian say, 'for suffering thy sacred head to be disgraced with a crown of thorns, that my head might be adorned with a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Thanks be to thee, who didst suffer thyself to be mocked by an ironical salutation and bowing of the knee! What they did in mockery, I will do in reverence. I adore thy glorious majesty, to which every knee shall bow. I willingly do thee homage, thou King of kings, and Lord of glory!'

5. Another reproachful abuse, was, that they spit in his face. The same indignity had already been offered in Caiaphas's house. How must the benignant countenance of the Lord Jesus have been disfigured with streaming blood, cruel bruises, and the spittle of this insolent multitude!

O my Saviour, did it cost thee so many indignities, to obtain for me the favour of lifting up my face before God with confidence and joy? Hast thou, for my sake, suffered that glorious face to be spit on, whose effulgence shone like the sun on the mount of transfiguration? I adore thy stupendous love, and condescension! May that countenance which was once covered with shameful spitting, present itself to me at the hour of death; and do thou then comfort and animate my soul with the light of thy countenance. How can I sufficiently praise thee for all the proofs of thy love, patience, and long-suffering, which, for the atonement of my sins, and as a pattern of patience, thou didst show under all these painful abuses and indignities!

PRAYER.

Eternal thanks be to thee, O Lamb of God, who in obedience to thy heavenly Father, and out of unspeakable love to our souls, didst enter on such a series of sufferings. Thou didst stand like a Lamb, that openeth not its mouth. Every one was allowed to vent his malicious rage against thee; yet thou didst patiently endure all, as from the hands of thy Father, committing thyself to him who judgeth righteously; and being certain that he would deliver thee from this hour, would crown thee with praise and honour, and command every knee to bow at thy sacred name. Grant, O Lord, that thy sufferings may not occasion a mere transitory emotion, but may make an indelible impression on our hearts. May they be a lesson to the secure, the licentious, and impenitent, what sin is, and how severely it has been punished in thy sacred person. May they also be a comfort to the humble, contrite, and troubled spirit, that it may in faith lay hold on the merits of thy sufferings, and become willing to follow thee even through reproach and insult! Amen.

CHAPTER XII.

A FARTHER ATTEMPT OF PILATE TO RELEASE CHRIST.

"*Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto the "Jews, Behold, I bring him forth unto you, that ye "may know that I find no fault in him. Then came "Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the "purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the "man! When the chief priests therefore and officers "saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him! Crucify "him! Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify "him; for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered "him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, "because he made himself the Son of God.*"

In these words we have an account of a new attempt by Pilate to release the Lord Jesus. He again gave testimony to the innocence of Jesus; and he presented our Lord to the Jews in a very deplorable condition, in order to move their pity.

1. Pilate repeated his public testimony of our Saviour's innocence. He went out of the hall, taking the blessed Jesus with him, and addressed the Jews in these words: "Behold I bring him forth unto you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him." Pilate had before given orders that Barabbas should be released, and had delivered Jesus to be crucified; being urged by the vehement demands of the people. He had caused our Saviour to be scourged by the soldiers, according to the Roman custom, as a prelude to the

execution. But his conscience still struggled against putting an innocent person to death; and he wished to try, whether Jesus might be released, without undergoing any further punishment. Divine Providence certainly over-ruled this circumstance, and so ordered it, that Pilate, after such an abuse of our Saviour by the hands of his soldiers, should again make a public declaration of his innocence. By this means, the sacrifice of the sins of the whole world is presented by Pilate to the priests of the Jewish people, in its spotless innocence; that, before it is slain, they may take a view of it, and see that it is without blemish.

But the heavenly Father never would have permitted his beloved Son to have been thus barbarously treated, if no trespasses had been imputed to him. Though the eyes of the Roman judge were utterly incapable of seeing into this mystery; yet the Holy Spirit assures us, "That God has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin."* Hence Christ is likewise termed, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."† It was for our sins therefore, that the Son of the Most High was insulted, buffeted, and cruelly scourged. Though the civil judge could find no fault in him; yet, as our surety, he was held guilty at the divine tribunal of all the crimes which the race of mankind had ever committed.

2. Pilate made use of another expedient, which was to present the blessed Jesus to the Jews in a very deplorable condition, in order to move their compassion. The appearance which our Lord made is described in these words: "Then came Jesus forth,

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* 2 Cor. v. 21. † John, i. 29.

wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe." The wreath of thorns, which had been pressed on his head, and the purple robe which had been hung about him by way of ridicule, were not taken off: but Jesus was publicly brought forth to the people with these marks of contempt, and presented to them as a pretended king, who had been sufficiently mortified and chastised, for his affectation of sovreignty. Here were, indeed, verified these words of Isaiah: "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty, that we should desire him." *

Pilate said unto them, "Behold the man! see what a deplorable condition this unhappy man is in; even allowing that he has been guilty of some faults, or has offended you. We shall here observe,

1. That the Saviour's being exhibited as a spectacle to the people, ought to be considered as a part of his meritorious sufferings. The Lord Jesus was now full of pains and wounds, and outwardly in so dreadful a condition, that as the Messiah, in the Psalms, he seems in effect to say, "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, and shake the head." † But inwardly his soul was lifted up in prayers and ejaculations to his heavenly Father, before whom he here presented himself covered with blood and stripes, in order to move his paternal tenderness to a reconciliation with us. His afflicted soul cried out, 'Behold the man! the man who suffers himself to be thus inhumanly treated

* Isaiah, liii. 2. † Psalms, xxii. 7, 8.

for men; and has taken upon him the punishment which they deserved, that they may obtain thy pardon. Father, forgive them the debts which they have contracted, and in acquittance of them, accept of the blood which streams from my lacerated body. Discharge at me the arrows of thy displeasure: I most willingly and from my heart, submit to bear thy chastisements.' Such thoughts as these no doubt employed our blessed Saviour at this juncture. His heart was full of filial confidence in his Father, being thoroughly persuaded that he would deliver him from ignominy and reproach; exalt him to honour, and present him to be adored by the heavenly host.—No sight is so profitable to the soul, as that of the blessed Jesus, thus wounded for our iniquities. In the eyes of unrenewed men, indeed, it is an image of disgust and horror. They see nothing in it, which can give comfort. If the contemplation of it raise in them some emotions of pity, these vanish without leaving any impression on the mind. But when a pious Christian, through the power of a true faith, beholds his mediator, he, like the diseased Israelites, who looked on the brazen serpent, is healed by the sight.—Impenitent sinners, behold the man! Observe how sin has caused your Redeemer to be treated! Here you may see, what will be your condition, unless you forsake your sins. If you die in unbelief, you will one day be exposed to reproach and disgrace, before Christ and his elect angels. But from this eternal ignominy your Saviour offers to deliver you. You must truly turn to God, acknowledge yourselves deserving of his heaviest judgments, and present yourselves before the throne of grace as criminals, worthy of death. O beware that you trifle not with this opportunity, until Jesus, who

once appeared as a worm and no man, shall seat himself on his throne of judgment, and pronounce sentence of eternal condemnation on those who have despised the merits of his blood. Behold, then, with looks of passionate longing after mercy; behold the Saviour! and implore him to deliver you from that ruin into which you are sunk, and to make you sons of God, and heirs of glory.—Ye covetous, behold the Saviour, who is debased and poor, in order to make many rich; who in his boundless liberality, hath poured out his precious blood for your salvation.—Penitent and faithful souls, behold the man! See how low his unspeakable love to you brought him. Turn your eyes from the sins with which your conscience is oppressed, and direct them to this Lamb of God, the sacred victim that has borne your sins, and presented himself to the divine justice, as the great sacrifice of atonement. Contemplate his deplorable appearance, by which he has removed the deformity of your guilt, when you were an abhorrence in the sight of God and in your own; and has made you acceptable to the Father. Reflect on his ignominious crown of thorns, by which he has acquired for you a right to a never-fading crown of glory. Consider his mean purple robe, by which he has obtained for you the garment of righteousness. Contemplate his wounds and stripes, as the remedy for the wounds of your conscience. Behold his countenance covered with blood, but beaming forth looks of tender love to your souls. With all your powers, give yourselves up to this faithful Saviour; and as he voluntarily suffered himself to be exposed to cruelty and rage, willingly devote yourselves to his service. Do not hesitate to suffer reproach in following Christ. If the

world insult and ridicule you, rejoice that you are made conformable to the suffering Jesus; and be assured, that he will one day present you to the Father in glory, saying, "Behold, I and the children whom thou hast given me." *

Let us now consider the effect of Pilate's endeavours to procure the release of our Lord.

1. They occasioned a tumultuous outcry. For "when the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him! crucify him!" The people seemed, at first, to have felt some compassion at the deplorable appearance of the blessed Jesus; insomuch that they stood in silent astonishment at the dismal spectacle. But the chief priests were too malignant and cruel to be susceptible of any compassion. In them were verified these words of the Psalmist, "Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion." † Here was accomplished what the Lord Jesus had, in a parable, before declared to this perverse generation, saying, "When the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the heir, come let us kill him." ‡ "When the chief priests saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him!"

Thus the spectacle had quite a different effect on them from what Pilate had imagined. He hoped by so deplorable an object, to have moved them to compassion; but on the contrary, at the sight of the blood issuing from our Saviour's wounded body, their thirst after his blood was the more inflamed. The

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* Isaiah, viii. 18.; Heb. ii. 13. † Psalms, xxii. 13.
‡ Matt. xxi. 38.

men of this world are inexorable in their rage against the faithful servants of Christ, who bear witness to the truth. When the Asiatic Jews saw St. Paul in the temple, "they stirred up the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, men of Israel help;—and all the city was moved, and the people came together."* And when St. Paul made his defence, the whole multitude lift up their voices, and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! for it is not fit that he should live. They cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air."† The histories of the martyrs particularly prove, that the Romish clergy never showed themselves more outrageous than when they had Christ suffering before their eyes, in the persons of his members and faithful witnesses. But alas! it little becomes us sinners to rail against the enemies of Christ. The malignant spirit of Cain, which naturally dwells in us, cried through the Jewish people, Crucify him! What the deluded Jews did is daily repeated. All those, especially, who are not moved by a suffering Saviour, to renounce the world, and flee from those sins for which he suffered to make atonement, do, in effect, cry out, Crucify him!—O blessed Jesus! grant that the consideration of thy manifold sufferings may have a more salutary effect on our souls! May every insult, and every pain which thou didst endure for our sakes, inspire us with fresh motives to obedience and gratitude.

2. We have, in the next place, an expostulation of Pilate. Pilate grew so impatient at this last outcry of the Jews, that he broke out into these passionate expressions, "Take ye him and crucify him; for I

* Acts, xxi. 27. † Acts, xxii. 23.

find no fault in him." In this he was so far to be commended, that he again publicly repeats his testimony of our Lord's innocence. But on the other hand, he is to be blamed for not exercising his authority to save the life of an innocent person, but on the contrary, giving them a permission to put him to death. Pilate had before scourged Jesus; and now he is willing to permit others to crucify him. What did it avail Pilate, that he was convinced of our Saviour's innocence? To what purpose did he now cry out the third time, "I find no fault in him;" since he acted contrary to his conviction? Thus, it will be of no benefit to us to cry out, "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world;" unless we forsake our sins, come unto him for life and salvation, and suffer his Spirit to guide us, that we may serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days. Preserve us, O Lord, from hypocrisy, that we may not confess thee with our mouths, and yet crucify thee by our manifold sins and impieties; or without concern see thee reproached and crucified by others. This exhortation of Pilate was followed

3. By the answer of the Jews; "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die." Hitherto, the accusation of the Jews against our blessed Saviour had turned chiefly on crimes against the civil government. They had charged him with forbidding the people to pay tribute to Cæsar, and making himself a king. But Pilate finding no ground for such a charge, repeatedly declared him innocent. The Jews therefore prefer a complaint of a different nature, arising out of the law of Moses, and which could not come under the cognizance of Pilate who was a heathen. They appeal to their law: "We have a

law, and by that law he ought to die." They had indeed a law, which condemned blasphemers and false prophets to be punished with death: * but this charge was most wrongfully applied to Christ, who had always highly honoured his heavenly Father.

How amazing is the reflection, that the great Angel of the Covenant, who himself gave the law on Mount Sinai, should here be accused as a transgressor of the law! We, alas! had broken the divine law, and by that law deserved to die. But, behold, he comes in our stead, who could say, "Thy law, O God, is within my heart;" † and permits the priests and people to cry out against him, "by our law he ought to die." He thus suffers himself to be condemned by the law, that we may be acquitted by the gospel.

Further: our blessed Lord has hereby sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, who have frequently been condemned as heretics, by declarations out of the word of God wrested from their true meaning.—Christ is daily crucified even among professing Christians by those who have the scriptures in their mouths, and appeal to them as the Jews did, to excuse and palliate their sinful actions.

The Jews represented Jesus as one, who not only exalted himself above the head of the Roman empire, but above all created beings, and made himself equal with God. Consequently they pronounced him guilty on a double account, namely, by the Roman law, as a rebel, and by the Jewish law, as a blasphemer. Yet it was not our blessed Saviour who made himself the Son of God, but He who said unto him, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;" ‡

* Levit. xxiv. 15.; Deut. xviii. 20. † Psalms, xl. 8.
‡ Psalms, ii. 7.; Heb. v. 5.

and who enjoined all "the kings and judges of the earth to kiss, or worship, his Son."—We, indeed, had arrogated an equality with God. Our first parents in their state of innocence were happy in the favour and presence of their Creator; but instead of resting satisfied with this honour, they would be as Gods.* By this attempt, they became like their seducer the devil, and with their posterity, fell under the sentence of temporal and eternal death. This arrogation of the divine perfections was here imputed to our Surety; on whom the Father laid the iniquity of us all.

PRAYER.

Thanks be to thee, O blessed Jesus, for thine unspeakable love, which moved thee to debase thyself, and to permit false accusations to be brought against thee, by which thou didst obtain for us the privilege of being acquitted at the divine tribunal. Bless that part of thy word which we have been considering. Grant that the contemplation of the mournful spectacle, exhibited to the people after thy painful scourging, may powerfully move the hearts of all those who, in their carnal security, are going forward in sin without any dread of the divine wrath, and may impress on them a deep sense of its accursed nature. Remind us more particularly of these thy sufferings, at the awful hour of death, that we may thence derive comfort and confidence to recommend our souls to thee, our merciful Saviour, and to die in thy faith. Grant this for the sake of thy blessed name. Amen.

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* Gen. iii. 5.

CHAPTER XIII.

PILATE'S LAST DISCOURSE WITH THE LORD JESUS.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more "afraid; and he went again into the judgment-hall, "and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus "gave him no answer. Then said Pilate unto him, "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not, that "I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release "thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at "all against me, except it were given thee from above: "therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater "sin."

In this last inquiry which Pilate addressed to the Lord Jesus, we may observe,

1. The occasion. "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the judgment-hall." The chief priests being disappointed in their first accusation, had brought a fresh charge; that he made himself the Son of God; and that consequently, according to their law, he ought to die. This new charge occasioned uncommon emotions in the mind of the Roman judge. It was the belief, both of the Romans and Greeks, that the gods used in a visible shape to come down from heaven, and converse with men. Thus the heathens at Lystra, took Paul and Barnabas to be deities, and cried out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men."* When Pilate heard that Jesus made him-

* Acts, xiv. 11, 12.

self the Son of God, he concluded, that if he were the offspring of the gods, some dreadful vengeance would fall on himself and his family: for he had already caused this divine person to be scourged, and had permitted his soldiers to treat him with indignities and abuse. His conscience now reproached him, and excited in him that fear of which the evangelist takes notice. By the words, "he was more afraid," it appears, that he had been uneasy during the whole of the proceedings against Christ. Notwithstanding all the meanness and ignominy which then surrounded the Lord Jesus, some majestic rays of glory beamed forth from him, and made such an impression on Pilate that he could not but conclude, that the person who now stood before his tribunal was something more than human. He probably at the same time recollected to have heard of the many surprising miracles which had been wrought by this Jesus. Something like this has often happened to Pagan judges, in their persecution of the members of Christ. They have been struck with awe and consternation at the undaunted appearance, and noble behaviour of martyrs and confessors; and have thus been compelled to bear their testimony to the majesty and veneration, which true religion carries along with it.

2. We observe the question put by Pilate to the Lord Jesus. Pilate went again into the judgment-hall, and said unto him, "Whence art thou?" He does not by these words inquire after his country, for he knew him to be of Galilee, and had on this account sent him to Herod. But by this question, Pilate's design was to inform himself of our Saviour's lineage and descent, whether he was of divine or human extraction; and if the former were true, from

what branch or family of the gods he was descended. We further remark,

3. The silence of our blessed Lord. "But Jesus," saith the evangelist, "gave him no answer." It was a question foreign to the purpose, and did not properly belong to any court of human judicature; nor did it proceed from a sincere love of truth, or a desire of knowing it; but from a mixture of curiosity and fear. Further; our blessed Lord well knew, that his eternal generation from the father, was beyond Pilate's comprehension. He has thus likewise confirmed his own prohibition: "Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." * Though wisdom be found of those that seek her, she is not to be allured or acquired by questions of mere curiosity. On the contrary, she turns aside from the frivolous, the self-sufficient, and the licentious. After this silence of the Lord Jesus, follows

4. A fresh expostulation of Pilate. The silence of Christ offended him, and he construed it as a contempt of his dignity. Accordingly he says to Jesus, "Speakest thou not unto me?" Thus he reproves Christ for not thinking him worthy of an answer; and adds, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Such behaviour at this crisis, he intimates, was contrary to prudence, and that it behoved our Lord to endeavour to gain Pilate over to his interest.—Pilate vainly boasts of his power, notwithstanding the servile fear which prevailed in his heart. He affects an air of haughtiness, the better to conceal his inward perplexity.—As

* Matt. vii. 6.

Pilate here encroached upon the prerogative of heaven, by vainly boasting of a power, which was intrusted to him by God, Jesus was called upon to vindicate the honour of his Father, which he did by a short answer. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." In this answer of our Lord, we may remark the following particulars.

1. He admits that Pilate, in quality of a judge, was invested with authority; but intimates to him that he derives it from God; so that consequently, he ought not to act arbitrarily, but to use his power according to the laws and will of God.

2. Our Lord acquaints Pilate, that his power in the ordinary course of things did not properly extend to Him; for he says, "Thou couldest have no power over me." The Jews indeed, were under the dominion of the Roman emperor, and consequently were subject to Pilate's jurisdiction: but though Christ, according to the flesh, was a Jew, yet, at the same time, he was "over all, God blessed for evermore."* In taking upon himself the form of a servant, he "submitted himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake;" but according to his divine nature, he was Lord and Creator; and Pilate was so far from having any power over him, that he had a full and absolute power over Pilate; and of this he gave a remarkable proof, in the consternation which the presence of his prisoner occasioned to him.

3. Our Lord informs Pilate from whence his power was derived. "Thou couldest have no power at all

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* Rom. ix. 5.

against me, unless it were given thee from above," i. e. from God. Thus the design of our Saviour is to refer to the counsel of God, to a higher hand, by which he was brought to the painful death which now approached. God, from the foundation of the world, had determined that his Son should take the human nature upon him, and die a violent and accursed death, as an atonement for the sins of the world. In this transaction, the work of God, and the proceedings of Pilate are carefully to be distinguished. God, as the supreme judge, made use of the judicial power of Pilate in order to execute his sentence on our Surety. But in the injustice of Pilate, God had no share; nor did the Author of all good prompt him to those unjust proceedings, of which he was guilty in this trial: on the contrary, they were the workings of his own corrupt heart.—Our Lord however admits, that the chief priests and scribes, by delivering him to Pilate, were guilty of the greater sin, and had the more to answer for. Indeed, they had already condemned him to die, and only employed the civil judge as the instrument to put their sentence in execution. The sin which these men were guilty of was of a deeper dye than that committed by Pilate, since they ought to have known from the writings of the prophets, who Jesus was. Nay, they must occasionally have felt a conviction that he was of God; and that no man could do those miracles which Jesus did, except God were with him.*

Our Lord does by no means exculpate Pilate, by making this acknowledgment; on the contrary, his design is rather to work on his conscience, and con-

* John, iii. 2.

vince him of his crime. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, and that the chief priests had delivered him out of envy, yet he acted contrary to this conviction. He staked the life of an innocent person against that of a notorious murderer, caused him to be inhumanly scourged, and permitted his soldiers to revile, and insult him. Notwithstanding all this, Pilate could still presumptuously boast of his power, and say, "Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Yet, if Christ was innocent, Pilate had no legal power to punish him; nor if he was guilty, had he any right to release him.—But the righteous God did not leave this injustice of Pilate unpunished; for, shortly after, on a complaint of the Samaritans against him, he was sent prisoner to Rome by Vitellius; and was deprived of his post by the Emperor Caligula, and then banished. At length, according to some historians, he put an end to his wretched life with his own hands, in exile.* Thus the divine vengeance pursued this unrighteous judge, and he was justly punished for the abuse of his power, in condemning the innocent Son of God. From this last discourse of Pilate with our Saviour, we may learn,

1. That servile fear may cause great emotions in the human heart, but can never work a thorough change. Pilate was struck with a secret fear by the rays of the divinity which beamed forth in Jesus Christ. He was greatly afraid when he found that it was the Son of God against whom he had proceeded so far; and his conscience foreboded him some calamity, for his having suffered his servants

* Eusebius in Hist. Eccles. Lib. II. c. 7.

to use Jesus in a contemptuous and inhuman manner. But Pilate was only actuated by a base and servile fear. He felt no concern for having committed acts of injustice and cruelty; but his fear proceeded from an apprehension, that the gods might punish him for the indignities he had offered to a divine person. This fear had not cured the malignity of Pilate's heart; and we find all his natural pride breaking forth soon after, in these words: "Speakest thou not unto me?"

Still, however, Pilate by his compunctions on this occasion may put thousands of Christians to the blush. This heathen was afraid, because he had suffered a son of the gods to be scourged. But who among us is afraid, when he is informed by an apostle, that by his sins he crucifies the Son of God afresh?* A mere servile fear, however, is not sufficient to convert the heart. On the contrary, experience shows that those, in whom such a fear may have caused temporary convictions, afterwards usually become more bold, licentious, and secure. A sinner accused by his own conscience, may be afraid of God, as a righteous judge, and of his temporal and eternal punishments; and this fear will compel him to abstain from many outward sins. But in order to produce repentance to salvation, it must be changed into a filial awe and reverence, by the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ; and must be tempered with love, which produces a delight in that which is good. Let such then, who by the convictions of conscience are awakened to a servile fear, reflect that they are yet advanced no farther than Pilate was; and that if they break off here, and proceed no farther in the work of conversion, they will

* Heb. vi. 6.

be as little benefited by such convictions, as Pilate was by his conviction of our Saviour's innocence. Let them come unto God by Christ, the Son of his love, who will fill their hearts with that perfect love, which casteth out slavish fear. *

2. There are many in our days, who like Pilate, start curious questions on the sublime mysteries of religion, but yet show a contempt of its fundamental truths. Pilate, as we have observed, had paid no regard to the confession which Christ had made concerning his kingdom; but had slighted that important truth which Christ came into the world to promulgate: yet now Pilate would penetrate into the dealings of God, and that mystery of faith, the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. How many are there, who in our days pretend to explain the mysteries of religion, before they know the first elements of Christianity, and while they are slaves to their lusts and passions. Young students in divinity, by the conceit which they entertain of their own reason, are often in danger of presumption. Many vainly dispute about nice points in religion, whilst they are strangers to repentance, self-denial, taking up the cross, and carrying it after Christ; and indeed have no wish to learn or practise such things. God reveals his secrets, as far as it concerns them to know, unto babes, and to the humble; but not to those proud spirits, who would unfold every thing by the natural light of reason, and arrogantly soar above the native simplicity of God's word.

Blessed Jesus! preserve us from all presumption and vain curiosity in spiritual things. Grant that we may

* John iv. 18.

know ourselves, and our sinful origin, before we take upon ourselves presumptuously to explain thy mysterious generation, and say, 'Whence art thou?' May we rather, after the example of thine elect angels, as often as we look into the mysteries of thy sacred person and office, bow our heads in devout reverence.

3. The wisdom of speaking and being silent at proper seasons, must be learned in the school of Christ.

Here we find remarkable instances of both. This wisdom no man is naturally possessed of. We often speak when we should be silent, and are silent when we should open our mouths. We are ready enough to speak whenever our own honour is called in question, and we then launch out into diffuse apologies: on the other hand, we have not a word to say, when we should stand up for God's honour, and vindicate the character of our neighbour, if wrongfully accused. But the inordinate desires of the heart are crucified at the cross of Christ; so that they no longer extend their dominion over the tongue, to make it express the workings of self-love, and self-interest. The grace of Christ confers an undaunted freedom to open our mouths and speak boldly, when the honour of God and the good of our neighbour require it; even though we foresee that it will draw down on us hatred and contempt.

Teach us, O blessed Jesus, that wisdom which no human skill can confer. Keep the door of our lips, that we may learn to be silent when thy honour will not be promoted by our speaking. On the other hand, open thou our mouths by thy 'Ephphatha,' when we are called upon to defend thy honour, and to bear witness to the truth.

4. He who knows the danger of being invested with power, will not boast of such power if possessed of it, or desire it, if he has it not. Probably, Pilate would have had less to answer for in the great day of account, if his power had been less extensive. This will also be the unhappy case of many others. As carnal men abuse all the precious gifts of heaven; as they employ their riches in riot or self-indulgence, and dedicate their talents to the cause of impiety and licentiousness, so they often abuse the power committed to their care, by persecuting or discouraging God's true servants. Let them reflect, that God will one day require of them a strict account, how they have used their power; that he will show mercy to the poor and oppressed, but, as the book of Wisdom expresses it, will "mightily torment the mighty men;" * i. e. those who have used their power contrary to the end for which it was ordained. If these things were duly considered, those who are in authority would use it with fear and trembling. We should not envy others that pre-eminence to which an awful responsibility is attached, but rather sit down contented in a low and humble station, as exposing us to less danger, both here, and in our eternal interests. Give us herein to be of one mind, O thou blessed Jesus, who in thy humble state of abasement, wast subject to every ordinance of man, and in thy glorious state of exaltation, usest thine unlimited power for the benefit of mankind, and the good of thy church. Grant that all subjects may imitate thee in the former, and that all in authority may follow thy illustrious example in the latter.

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* Wisdom, vi. 2.

5. It was our pride and rebellion against the divine law, which caused the Son of God to be subject to the power of an earthly tribunal. Our minds are filled with aspiring thoughts; and this haughty temper is innate in all of us, however humble our situation in life. But if we would receive any benefit from Christ's abasement, we must be ready to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and pray that our ungovernable pride may be changed into the spirit of meekness. Lord, subdue our hearts, break our stubborn tempers, and make them conformable to thine!

6. Though he, who suffers himself to be seduced to sin, is by no means innocent in the sight of God, yet the seducer has more to answer for. "He who delivereth me unto thee," and thus seduced thee to all these acts of injustice, "hath the greater sin!" The more knowledge a person is endowed with, the more premeditation he acts with, and the more warnings and admonitions he has had, the greater is his sin.* In all these respects, the guilt of those who delivered up our Lord, exceeded that of Pilate. Let such as are conscious of deep and aggravated guilt, of sins against light and knowledge, of having corrupted and seduced others, acknowledge their depravity; humble themselves before their Lord and Saviour, and be earnest in prayer, that they may be so changed by divine grace, that in future others may be edified by their example, and brought into the way of life; that in future their "light may so shine before men,

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* Luke, xii. 47.

that others seeing their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven."

PRAYER.

We thank thee, O Father, for giving up thy dear Son to the power of an earthly tribunal, that he might expiate and atone for our fall, by which we had withdrawn from our obedience to thee. We beseech thee, by thy Holy Spirit, to soften our stubborn hearts, and refractory wills, and move us to a sincere repentance and faith in thy Son. We also thank thee, O faithful Saviour, that thou didst submit to be thus humbled and abased, that we might be exalted. Make us partakers of thy merit for the remission of our sins, and grant that we may follow thy example here, and may reign with thee hereafter.—Amen.

CHAPTER XIV.

PILATE'S LAST FEEBLE ENDEAVOUR TO RELEASE THE LORD JESUS.

" *And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but*
" *the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go,*
" *thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself*
" *a king, speaketh against Cæsar. When Pilate there-*
" *fore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and*
" *sat down in the judgment-seat, in a place that is*
" *called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.*
" *And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about*
" *the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold*
" *your king! But they cried out, Away with him! Away*
" *with him! crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall*
" *I crucify your king? The chief priests answered,*
" *We have no king but Cæsar. When Pilate saw that*
" *he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult*
" *was made, he took water, and washed his hands before*
" *the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of*
" *this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all*
" *the people, and said, " His blood be on us, and on*
" *our children! Then delivered he him therefore unto*
" *them to be crucified.*"

In these words, we have an account of the last fruitless attempt of Pilate to release our Saviour.

Pilate's design is expressed in the following words: " From thenceforth Pilate sought to release him." Pilate had already laboured with this view, partly by unwarrantable means. This fresh attempt, we may suppose to have been occasioned by our Lord's words,

"Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above. Therefore he that delivered me unto thee, hath the greater sin." Thus Jesus intimated to him, that if he abused his power, he would draw upon himself punishment from above. Pilate's conscience was touched; and he was alarmed, under the apprehension, that Jesus was the Son of God. He therefore made a fresh effort to release him. The chief priests had imagined, that by accusing Jesus of having made himself the Son of God, they should overcome Pilate's reluctance; but this accusation on the contrary, only made him the more afraid of condemning Christ, and more solicitous for having him released. Thus the plans of evil men are often disappointed. Satan and the world frequently combine to do all the hurt they can to a soul, that is earnestly bent on turning to Jesus Christ. The former assails it within, the latter attacks it from without. But, by God's superintending providence, their machinations have quite another effect; the soul agitated by the temptations of Satan and the world, is driven to prayer and repentance, and thus obtains refuge. The goodness and wisdom of God, are able to turn the most pernicious views of Satan to the good of our souls. What an invaluable privilege is this of the children of God, that amidst all the devices of their spiritual and temporal enemies, they may trust, and not be afraid: and may joyfully say with the patriarch, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good." *

In the next place, we are to consider the violent effort, which rendered the purpose of Pilate ineffectual.

* Gen. l. 20.

As he did not set out right at first, nor walk in the plain and direct path of justice, his subsequent endeavours to release Jesus proved abortive. The Jews, perceiving what he had in view, cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." Here they have recourse again to their former accusation, charging our Lord with crimes against the Roman government; and endeavouring to give fresh force to the accusation, by an alarming inference, which might well stagger Pilate's resolution. Whosoever making himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar, i. e. opposes the Roman emperor's right over the province, and thereby lays a foundation for tumults and rebellion. They infer, that if Pilate should let this man go, he was not Cæsar's friend: for how should he be a friend to the emperor, who protected his open enemy; and when the prisoner is brought before him, was for letting him go, and giving him opportunity again to carry on his seditious practices? This argument operated strongly on the mind of Pilate. He forgot that Christ's kingdom was not of this world; and the fear of the emperor's displeasure, with which he was indirectly threatened, shook his good intention. Hence we shall deduce the following observations.

Satan is very dexterous in attacking every man on his most vulnerable side. This was his method with Pilate. The menace of the emperor's displeasure struck him with consternation. The tempter knows our natural constitution and predominant inclinations, and directs his temptations accordingly. He knows when to lay baits to allure, or to apply threatenings to terrify the sinner. The proud and ambitious he

entices by the hopes of temporal honours, or terrifies with the fear of disgrace, and a deprivation of their dignities. He allures a voluptuous sensualist by the prospect of carnal delights and entertainments; or, on the other hand, alarms him, with the fear of affliction, imprisonment, distress, and pain. He affects the miser by the hope of gain, or the fear of losing his possessions. When a prosperous worldling is placed in such circumstances, that, on the one hand, he has the opportunity of making great additions to his fortune, by renouncing the gospel, or on the other, by adhering to the truth, is in danger of being stripped of every possession, Satan lays hold of him by his fondness for earthly things, so that unless some higher strength enable him to withstand the temptation, and his soul be fortified by grace, he surrenders. We shall be continually exposed to Satan's assaults, whilst we are attached to temporal advantages. This Pilate found to be the case. The favour of the Roman emperor being, as he thought, of the chief concern to him, he sunk under the trial. By one indirect menace of the emperor's displeasure, he is over-awed. His haughty spirit which, but a little before, had burst forth in those arrogant words, "Knowest thou not that I have power to release thee," was at once subdued by the distant apprehension of exposing his authority to risque. Thus it must happen, when a man accounts the friendship of the world, and the favour of the great, indispensable to his happiness. To avoid the loss of these, integrity and a good conscience are forfeited, and virtue and justice are attended to no further than is consistent with self-interest. Let the conduct of Pilate be a warning to us. Happy are they, who

by the miscarriage of others, learn to know their own weakness, before the enemy take advantage of it to their destruction. The world ought to be of so little importance in our eyes, compared with the Saviour, that we should be ready to part with all, rather than offend him or injure his honour. This renunciation of the world, is the touchstone of genuine Christianity. Whatever progress a person may make in the government of his passions, and the practice of moral virtues, if he do not deny himself, and renounce the world, he cannot be Christ's disciple, and will be in danger of yielding to the first suitable temptation. He who does not fear and love God above all things, and place his chief confidence in him, wants that steady governing principle, which is the only effectual security against making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience; nor is he able to perform aright one single Christian duty.

We come now to consider the consequence of Pilate's timidity and irresolution; and here the three following particulars deserve our notice.

1. The preparation made for condemning our Lord. This is described in these words: "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth;" out of the hall of judgment where he had privately examined him, "and sat down in the judgment-seat, in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha." There was probably an elevated tribunal erected adjoining to Pilate's house, where he usually pronounced sentence of death on malefactors. In this seat of judgment he places himself; and as he had weakened his credit with the Jews by his former indecisiveness, he was desirous to recover their good opinion, by formally pronouncing sentence on Jesus.

St. John specifies the time of the day, and the season of the year. It was the preparation, i. e. the day before the Sabbath, and the Friday preceding the Passover; when they prepared themselves for the approaching Sabbath, which was a high day, and to be observed with great solemnity. "It was about the sixth hour." In some ancient manuscripts the fourteenth verse of the nineteenth chapter of St. John runs thus, "It was about the third hour," and this agrees with St. Mark's account. "It was the third hour, and they crucified him:" that is, according to our computation, nine o'clock in the morning: and it is evident from the accounts of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, that the crucifixion had taken place previous to the sixth hour, or twelve at noon. * After this follows,

Secondly, Pilate's last effort to release our Lord; but this was very faint, and proved ineffectual. "And he said unto the Jews, Behold your king." As if he had said, 'Look on him again; consider how severely he has been handled: supposing he has acted indiscreetly, he has been sufficiently punished. Would it not be better to show him mercy and spare his life, than to punish him any further?' But the Jews cried out, "Away with him! Away with him!" He is not our king; "Crucify him!" Hence it appears, that these words of Pilate only added fuel to the flames. "Pilate then saith unto them, shall I crucify your king?" He would work upon them, by suggesting, that it would be an indelible stain on their nation, if they suffered their king to be crucified. But such motives had little weight with a tumultuous assembly,

* Matt. xxvii. 45.; Mark, xv. 25—33.; Luke, xxiii. 44.

frantic with rage and cruelty; their reputation they willingly sacrificed to their hatred against Christ. On this remonstrance of Pilate, the chief priests broke out into this declaration, "We have no king but Cæsar." At other times they loudly murmured against the Roman yoke, and held it inconsistent with their honour and liberty to pay tribute to the emperor; but their hatred against Christ made them now pretend to be loyal subjects to Cæsar, rather than acknowledge for king, the victim of their malice, who now stood before them. Thus they publicly disown the hope of Israel; the Messiah who had been promised to them under the title of a king; and deny this important article of their religion before the Pagan governor. Upon this followed,

Thirdly, The condemnation of the Lord Jesus, which is thus described: "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made; he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children! Then he delivered him to be crucified." In this account we may observe,

1. The motives that induced Pilate to condemn Jesus. These were not any crimes which our Lord had committed; for of those which had been laid to his charge, the judge had publicly acquitted him. Pilate therefore was at last induced to pronounce this sentence, partly because there were no hopes of bringing the Jews to consent to his release, and partly because there was reason to fear, lest further opposition might occasion tumult.

2. Pilate's declaration and protest, antecedent to

the sentence. "Pilate," as the evangelist observes, "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude." It was an usual ceremony, both among the Jews and heathens, to wash the hands, as a token of innocence. This custom Pilate here observes; and, besides the mere ceremony, expresses in words what he intended by the symbol: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." He once more publicly acknowledges the innocence of the Lord Jesus, whom he styles a just man; an appellation which the wife of Pilate had before given to our Saviour. He shifts the blame of Christ's death from himself, and lays it on the consciences of the Jews. As if he had said, 'You have absolutely compelled me to order this innocent person to be crucified, and put to death; and you must be answerable for it before God and man.' Upon this, these infatuated wretches without any scruple took the guilt of this horrid crime on their own consciences; crying out, "His blood be on us, and on our children!" By this they signified, that Pilate had no reason for any apprehensions, since they would be answerable for the whole blame before God and man. Nay, they pledged their own persons and those of their children, that whatever vengeance or punishment should follow, they would take the whole of it on themselves and their posterity. "His blood be on us, and on our children." O dreadful words, which indicate the greatest infatuation and obduracy! How soon did this wretched nation feel the load of that curse to which they impiously devoted themselves, and which fell in a most signal manner on the heads of them, and of their descendants, who have been groaning under its oppressive weight, nearly eighteen centuries!

3. "He delivered him to be crucified." Pilate, sitting on his judgment-seat, pronounced sentence in a place which, from its elevation, was called Gabbatha. Thus the sentence of condemnation was publicly pronounced, in the eyes of the whole world. We may here observe,

1. That as we often illegally place ourselves on the judgment-seat of private censure, to arraign and condemn our innocent neighbour; so the Son of God suffered himself to be unjustly condemned. He has solemnly warned us, saying, "Judge not; condemn not:" but who pays a due regard to these precepts? Of all our Saviour's injunctions, not one is more frequently violated. What is a more usual topic of conversation than censure? We condemn our absent neighbour; his words and actions are canvassed, exposed, censured, judged, without the least indulgence. Now as we so often sit in the seat of judgment, and, instead of judging ourselves, and strictly examining our own actions, rashly condemn our neighbour; the Son of God was pleased to submit to condemnation, pronounced from an unjust tribunal. May this consideration awaken in us an abhorrence of harsh judging, and calumny!

2. The sin of the Jews in rejecting Christ as their king, is daily renewed among Christians. It is repeated by those worldlings, who prefer the service of their lusts and temporal enjoyments to that obedience of Christ, to which they are called in the gospel. The Jews cried out, "We have no king but Cæsar!" And are not the covetous, the proud, the ambitious, and the sensual, all of them the subjects of their different lusts and passions? Do not they deny the Lord, and say in effect, "We will not have him to reign

over us?" Those also who seek deliverance from wrath, forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, in any other way than through Christ, presumptuously reject the only Mediator and Saviour of mankind, and choose other saviours, as impotent as themselves. May the Lord keep us from such infatuation, that we may not feel the truth of these words of the Psalmist, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after other gods."*

3. The blood of Christ has both a vindictive and conciliatory power. It is poured down in vengeance on those who trespass against it, either by placing in it a carnal and presumptuous confidence, notwithstanding their wicked lives and impenitent hearts; or by treading it under foot, and accounting the blood of the covenant an unholy or unnecessary thing. Such sinners will, by the divine justice, be pursued as murderers of Christ; and that blood which was shed for the purifying of the conscience, and the forgiveness of sins, will be poured on them in vengeance and judgments. On the other hand, its healing conciliatory power, is manifested to all humble, broken, and contrite hearts. It is to them the means of justification, and all their sins will be forgiven in consideration of this precious blood. It is poured upon them for sanctification and holiness, cleanses them from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, † and opens to them a passage from death unto life. ‡

May God of his infinite mercy grant, that the blood of Christ may, in this blessed manner be on us, and on our children, and that it may manifest its reconciling, justifying, and sanctifying power in all our hearts!

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* Psalms, xvi. 4. † 1 John, i. 7.; 2 Cor. vii, 1. ‡ John, v. 24.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! May we partake of thy blood, not in its vindictive, but in its conciliatory power, to the quieting of our consciences, the sanctifying and purifying our hearts. Bless our consideration of this part of thy sufferings, and grant that we may not lose any grace wrought in us, by the operation of thy good Spirit. We commend to thee the seed of so many important and saving truths, now sown; water it with the dew of thy blessing, that it may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy name! Amen.

PART III.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ON MOUNT GOLGOTHA.

The Narratives of the four Evangelists harmonised.

"THEN the soldiers took off the purple robe from "Jesus, and put his own raiment on him, and led him "away to crucify him. And Jesus went forth bearing "his cross. And there were also two malefactors led "with him to be put to death. And as they led Jesus "away, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, "the father of Alexander and Rufus, who passed by, "coming out of the country. And they laid hold "on him, and compelled him to bear his cross; and "they laid on him the cross, that he might bear it "after Jesus. And there followed him a great com-"pany of people, and of women who also bewailed "and lamented him.

"But Jesus turning unto the women said, Daughters "of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but weep for your-"selves, and for your children. For, behold, the "days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed "are the barren and the wombs that never bare, "and the paps that never gave suck. Then shall they "begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to "the hills, cover us. For if they do these things in "a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

" And they bring him unto a place called in the " Hebrew, Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the " place of a skull. And they gave him to drink " vinegar (or sour wine) mingled with myrrh and gall: " and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink; " and he received it not. And they crucified him " there, and two other malefactors with him, one on " the right hand, and the other on the left, and Jesus " in the midst. And the scripture was fulfilled, which " saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. " Then said Jesus, Father! forgive them; for they " know not what they do.

" And Pilate wrote a superscription of his accusation, " and put it on the cross. And the writing was, " Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. This title " then read many of the Jews; for the place where " Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was " written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then " said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write " not, The king of the Jews; but that he said, I am " the king of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have " written, I have written. Then the soldiers, when " they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and " made four parts (to every soldier a part) and also his " coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from " the top throughout. They said therefore among " themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it " whose it shall be. And they cast lots upon it, what " every man should take; that the scripture might be " fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among " them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These " things therefore the soldiers did. And sitting down, " they watched him there; and it was about the third " hour when they crucified him.

" And the people stood beholding him; and they " that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, " and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and " buildest it in three days, save thyself; if thou be " the Son of God, come down from the cross. Like- " wise also the chief priests, mocking him with the " scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself " he cannot save. If he be the Christ, the king of " Israel, the chosen of God, let him save himself, and " now come down from the cross, that we may see it, " and we will believe him. He trusted in God, let " him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he " said, I am the Son of God. And the soldiers also " mocked him, coming to him and offering him " vinegar; and saying, If thou be the king of " the Jews, save thyself. The thieves also, who " were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. " And one of the malefactors, who were hanged, " railed on him, saying, If thou be the Christ, save " thyself and us.

" But the other malefactor answering, rebuked him, " saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in " the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for " we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this " man has done nothing amiss. And he said unto " Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into " thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, " I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in " Paradise. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, " his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife " of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus " therefore saw the disciple standing by, whom he " loved, he said unto his mother, Woman, behold thy " son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy

" mother! And from that hour that disciple took her
" unto his own home.

" Now from the sixth hour, there was darkness over
" all the land unto the ninth hour; and the sun was
" darkened. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried
" with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani, that is
" to say, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken
" me? Some of them that stood there, when they
" heard that saying, said, Behold! this man calleth
" for Elias. After this, Jesus knowing that all things
" were now accomplished, that the scriptures might be
" fulfilled, said, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel
" full of vinegar; and one ran, and took a sponge, and
" filled it with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and
" stuck it on a reed, and held it to his mouth, and gave
" him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether
" Elias will come to save him, and take him down.

" When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It
" is finished. And he cried with a loud voice, and
" said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:
" and having said this, he bowed his head, and gave
" up the ghost.

" And behold, the vail of the temple was rent in
" twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did
" quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were
" opened, and the bodies of many saints which slept,
" arose, and came out of the graves after his resur-
" rection, and went into the holy city, and appeared
" unto many. Now when the Centurion who stood
" over against him, and they that were with him
" watching Jesus, saw that he so cried out, and the
" earthquake, and those things that were done; they
" feared greatly, and glorified God, saying, Certainly,
" this was a righteous man; truly this was the Son

" of God. And all the people that came together to that
" sight, beholding the things which were done, smote
" their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaint-
" ance, and the women that had followed Jesus from
" Galilee, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary
" the mother of James the less, and and the mother of
" Joses, and Salome, and the mother of Zebedee's
" children, who also when he was in Gallilee followed
" him, and many other women who came up with him
" to Jerusalem, stood afar off beholding these things.

" The Jews, therefore, because it was the prepara-
" tion, that the bodies should not remain upon the
" cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath was a
" high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be
" broken, and that they might be taken away. Then
" came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first,
" and of the other, who was crucified with him. But
" when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead
" already, they brake not his legs: but one of the
" soldiers with a spear pierced his side; and forthwith
" came thereout blood and water. And he that saw
" it bare record, and his record is true; for these things
" were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A
" bone of him shall not be broken; and again another
" scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they
" have pierced.

" And now, when even was come, because it was
" the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,
" came a rich man, named Joseph, of Arimathea, a
" city of the Jews; he was an honourable counsellor,
" and a good man and a just. The same had not
" consented to the counsel and deed of them: who
" also was a disciple of Jesus, (but secretly for fear
" of the Jews,) and waited for the kingdom of God.

" He went in boldly unto Pilate, and besought him
" that he might take away the body of Jesus. And
" Pilate marvelled if he were already dead; and calling
" unto him the Centurion, he asked him, Whether
" he had been any while dead? And when he knew
" it of the Centurion, he gave the body of Jesus
" to Joseph, and commanded it to be delivered to him.
" And Joseph bought fine linen. And there came
" also Nicodemus, (who at the first came to Jesus
" by night,) and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes,
" about a hundred pounds weight. Then took they
" the body of Jesus, and wrapped it in clean linen,
" and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as
" the manner of the Jews is to bury.

" Now in the place where he was crucified, there
" was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulchre
" hewn out of a rock, wherein never man before was
" laid. There laid they Jesus, therefore, because of
" the Jews preparation day; for the sepulchre was
" nigh at hand. And they rolled a great stone to the
" door of the sepulchre, and departed. And the
" women also, who came with him from Galilee fol-
" lowed after. Among these were Mary Magdalene,
" and Mary the mother of Joses, who sat over against
" the sepulchre, and beheld how and where the body
" was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices
" and ointments, and rested the Sabbath day, according
" to the commandment. Now the next day that fol-
" lowed the day of the preparation, the chief priests
" and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir,
" we remember that that deceiver said, while he was
" yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Com-
" mand therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure
" until the third day, lest his disciples come by night

" and steal him away, and say unto the people, He " is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be " worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye " have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as you " can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, " sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

PREPARATORY PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, who wast crucified in weakness, but now livest in power, and savest to the uttermost all those who come to God through thee, be pleased to favour our weak attempt to consider the concluding scene of thy sufferings, and make it conducive to the glory of thy name. Grant that a sense of our weakness may awaken in us an earnest desire of divine assistance, and the influences of thy Spirit; and satisfy this desire, by giving us those talents and graces, which thou knowest to be necessary to an edifying consideration of thy sufferings. Amen.

CHAPTER I.

THE LORD JESUS LED TO HIS CRUCIFIXION.

WE have already discoursed of the several sufferings which our Mediator endured on the Mount of Olives; before the spiritual court of the Jews; and the civil tribunals of Pilate and Herod. It now remains that we consider his sufferings on Mount Golgotha, the place appointed by the wisdom of God for the conclusion of his meritorious undertaking. The beginning of this remarkable transaction runs thus:

"*Then the soldiers took the purple robe off from Jesus,*
"*and put his own raiment on him, and led him away*
"*to crucify him. And Jesus went forth bearing his*
"*cross. And there were also two other malefactors led*
"*with him to be put to death. And as they led Jesus*
"*away, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, the*
"*father of Alexander and Rufus, who passed by, coming*
"*out of the country. And they laid hold on him, and*
"*compelled him to bear his cross, and on him they laid*
"*the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there*
"*followed him a great company of people, and of women,*
"*who also bewailed and lamented him.*"

THESE words exhibit to us the mournful procession of the blessed Jesus to his crucifixion. Our Lord had during his sufferings been already forced to take several painful and ignominious walks. From the Mount of Olives he had been hurried as a prisoner, to Annas; from Annas to Caiaphas, from Caiaphas to Pilate; from Pilate to Herod, and from Herod

back again to Pilate; and consequently he must have passed through several of the streets of Jerusalem. Now he was to take his last mournful walk, led as a malefactor from Pilate's house to the place of execution.

Jesus was led away immediately after sentence had been pronounced on him. "Then," i. e. immediately after this, Pilate delivered him up to the Roman soldiers, to be crucified; for amongst the Romans, the soldiers were usually the executioners in such cases. The Roman emperor Tiberius, who then sat on the throne, had, about seven years before, issued an order, that no criminal should be executed until ten days after sentence had been pronounced. But the benefit of this edict did not extend to murderers and rebels; it being judged necessary for the public tranquillity, that such delinquents should be immediately put to death. Our blessed Saviour therefore was not intitled to this privilege; for he had been indicted as a mover of sedition and a rebel, and the Jews urged the Roman governor with such vehemence, that he was obliged to give orders for the immediate execution of the sentence. No one interposed in his favour, or spoke a word of exhortation or comfort to him; but he was dragged to death with the utmost precipitancy. He, indeed, stood in no need of preparation for death; but he denied himself all human comforts, that he might acquire for us a right to expect divine consolation in our last hours. By the precipitancy with which he was led to death, he sanctified the sufferings of his faithful servants, when they are suddenly surprised by the impatient barbarity of their persecutors, who allow them no time for recollection or preparation. Thus every circum-

stance of our Saviour's sufferings is a source of comfort to his followers.

But let us take a nearer view of the last mournful walk of Jesus to his execution, and remark,

First, In what manner he was led to Golgotha.

Secondly, The company which attended him.

Thirdly, What happened to him by the way.

I.

As to the manner in which our Saviour was led away to execution, the evangelical history informs us, he was clothed in his own raiment, and bore his cross. "The soldiers took the purple robe off from Jesus, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him." The Lord Jesus had a little before, amongst other mockeries and insults, been dressed in a purple mantle; and in this garb he was afterwards led away, and shown to the people, as a mock king. But now when he was to be carried to the place of execution, the soldiers took off from him this purple mantle, and put on him his own upper garment, that he might be the more easily known by the spectators; otherwise, probably, his sacred face was so disfigured, that few, who had seen him before, would have known that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was led to execution. We may conclude, that the wreath of thorns remained on his head, as a public mark that the crime for which he was crucified, was the having pretended to be king of the Jews. As the purple robe must have adhered to the body now bloody and cruelly torn by scourging, the taking it off in a rude manner would afford new matter of sport to the unfeeling soldiers, as it must have

caused sensible pain to the Lord Jesus, by tearing open his wounds. Being again clothed in his own raiment, the cross was laid on his shoulders; and he was obliged to carry that heavy piece of timber. It was a custom among the Romans, that the criminal to be crucified carried his own cross to the place of execution. As the cross consisted of a long beam of timber, and a short transverse piece, the criminal's arms were extended, and the transverse piece fastened to them. To this the blessed Jesus seems to allude, when he thus forewarns Peter, "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."* And in this manner, we may suppose the blessed Jesus "went forth, bearing his cross." Pain and ignominy attend his weary steps in this mournful walk. Often must his knees, already spent and enfeebled, have sunk under this oppressive weight! At the same time, to bear the cross, that instrument of punishment, as an abhorrence and execration to the people, was a circumstance of the most sensible reproach and ignominy. Oh, the inconceivable depth of the humiliation of the Son of God, who goes forth in the character of a wretched slave condemned to death, and bearing his own cross! On this cross he was to become a curse for us; to be forsaken of God, and as it were to taste the bitterness of eternal death. We shall hence infer the following truths.

1. The mournful walk of our blessed Lord to the place of his crucifixion, has been productive of many blessings to mankind. Every step was marked with

* John, xxi. 18.

blood; but at the same time, every step dropped comfort to our souls. Many painful, weary steps did the blessed Jesus take for our sake; but all would have availed us nothing, had he not determined on this last sorrowful walk. We were under sentence of death; and this sentence could no other way be reversed, than by our Mediator's suffering himself to be led to death in our stead. To this he submitted with the most cheerful complacency; the Son of God, was able to say to his Father, "Lo, I come: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."* He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He suffered himself to be led out of the earthly Jerusalem, to procure an entrance for us into the heavenly. He submitted to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, that the precious souls of men might not be dragged to the slaughter by their spiritual enemies. Evil spirits would have dragged thee, O sinner, from the grave to judgment, and from thence to everlasting punishment. But since thy Redeemer was thus led to death, thou wilt never be led away by the powers of hell, if thou believest in the name of the Son of God, and givest up thyself diligently to follow him, and obey his precepts. O then praise and adore that Saviour, who, by thus submitting to temporal death, hath rescued thee from death eternal!

2. Nothing can make a Christian more willingly and cheerfully take up his cross, than the consideration that his Saviour bore it before him. Who will now refuse to take upon him the cross, when he sees his Lord and Master bending under the weight

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* Psalms, xl. 7.

of it? When a person of such transcendent dignity, whose love to mankind was so great, sets us the example, and calls to us, saying, "Whosoever will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me," it would be the basest ingratitude to refuse to bear it for his sake. Consider that the eternal Son of God, who upholds all things by the word of his power, who always dwelt in the regions of bliss, and had dominion over innumerable hosts of adoring angels, humbled himself so low, and bore the ignominious cross, that we might be delivered from the curse of God, and crowned with eternal blessings. Are we not ashamed of our timidity and ingratitude? Let us humbly implore of the Redeemer, strength to follow him, and bear his cross: and if we would have comfort in the cross, let us resolve to enter into fellowship with him, both by the inward crucifixion of the flesh, and by outwardly taking up his reproach. As he suffered both in body and soul; so must his followers taste of both kinds of sufferings in some degree, and resign themselves to his will. These are our Saviour's own words, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and follow me, cannot be my disciple."* If we are exempt from outward reproach and persecution, we are to show ourselves the more faithful, by daily crucifying the old man of sin, with its affections and lusts, and by submitting to any inward sufferings, which it may please God to lay upon us.

II.

We come, in the second place, to consider the company which attended the Lord Jesus to Golgotha.

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* Luke, xiv. 27.

A multitude of people was collected on this occasion, which generally happens even when common malefactors are carried to execution. Curiosity brought many; others came from a malicious desire of entertaining themselves with the pains and sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless we shall find that the spectacle produced a salutary effect on the beholders. Thus a blessing often accompanies attendance on the Lord Jesus in his word and ordinances; though our attendance at first may not proceed from proper motives.

Besides this mixed multitude, there were two malefactors led with the Lord Jesus to be crucified. They must have been murderers and robbers; crucifixion being the punishment of those crimes among the Romans. These notorious criminals, Pilate probably reserved for the feast of the Passover; that their execution before an extraordinary concourse of people might make the greater impression.

Our Lord, by this circumstance of his passion, has sanctified the sufferings of his followers, who are often classed with heretics, rebels, and the worst of mankind, and are treated as if they deserved to suffer the same punishment.

III.

We come now to consider what happened to the Lord Jesus in the way to his crucifixion. The treatment he met with was very different from that which he had experienced six days before, at his public entrance into Jerusalem. He then entered the city amidst the joyful acclamations and applauding Hosannas of the people. Then their cry was, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Now curses,

insults, mockeries and bitter sarcasms pursued him as he went forth to Golgotha. The evangelists however notice two incidents of rather an alleviating nature, which happened while our Saviour walked to the place of execution; that he was eased of the weight of his cross, and that he was publicly lamented by the compassionate women of Jerusalem.

1. Jesus is eased of the heavy load of the cross, it being taken from him, and laid on another. The enemies of our blessed Lord perhaps did not intend to show him any kindness by taking the cross from him; but, on the contrary, either to hurry on the faster to Mount Golgotha, or to reserve our Lord for more acute pangs and tortures. Their eagerness for the execution of the sentence was not able to bear the slow pace with which Jesus, by reason of weakness and fatigue, proceeded: and perceiving that his strength was exhausted, they took the burden from him, that he might not sink under it, and thus prevent the slower and more painful death which they had prepared for him. Be this as it may, we do not suppose that any motives of compassion actuated their minds. Yet his heavenly Father so directed this circumstance, as to procure some alleviation of his sufferings. The soldiers looked out for a fit person to carry the cross with the desired expedition. There happened to pass by a man called Simon, a native of Cyrene, a city of Lybia, which, though about a thousand miles distant from Jerusalem, was inhabited by Jews, who had a synagogue there. This man might be coming to Jerusalem, to perform his devotions in the temple. He might be a secret disciple of the Lord Jesus; who seeing him sink under the load of the cross, either by words or gesture expressed some compassion for him. This would be a

sufficient inducement with the soldiers to lay hold of Simon, and to fasten the cross on his back. He was compelled in the first instance to carry it perhaps by way of ridicule; but if he was a disciple of Christ, he would patiently submit to be mocked and ridiculed with his Saviour, and learn of Christ to possess his soul in patience.

The second particular incident, which happened while our blessed Saviour walked to the place of execution, was a public testimony of pity and compassion. A great company of women who were inhabitants of Jerusalem, or had followed him from Galilee, accompanied him, bewailing and lamenting. Probably, in some of them this was only the effect of a humane sympathetic feeling, which generally shows itself in compassion to condemned malefactors. In others this natural tenderness might be mixed with self-love; and arise from a concern that a person who performed such surprising miracles, who healed the sick, the lame, and the blind, and was their physician and helper, should be put to a shameful and ignominious death. But in some of them, it may be supposed to have taken its rise from purer and more disinterested motives. Be this as it may, their gestures betokened passionate grief; for they beat their breasts,* wrung their hands, wept and lamented. We may doubtless suppose them to have been ignorant of the mystery of the cross, and of the purposes of God with regard to the sufferings of his Son, and that they concluded all the hopes of Israel would be buried in his grave. The tears of the spectators however bore witness to his innocence, and were

* Id indicat verbum ἐκοπτοντο, quod propriè *percusserunt*, metonymicè *planxerunt* significat, quia lugentes pectus percutere solebant.

preludes to the accomplishment of the prophecy of Zechariah, who declares, that all the women of the tribes of Israel should one day mourn for the Messiah.* We may deduce the following truths.

1. God is so gracious, that he never suffers us to be oppressed beyond what we are able to bear; but when it is most necessary, he provides some relief. Thus it happened to Jesus, in the instance before us. When his human strength was so exhausted, that he was unable to bear his cross, God so directed, that he was eased of its weight. Thus will it be with every sincere disciple, who with patience and resignation bears the cross of Christ. His faithful and compassionate Saviour, who from his own experience knows what it is for human nature to be loaded, so as to sink under its burden, will have mercy on him; will prevent him from being oppressed beyond his strength; will lighten the burden under which he groans, and support him with his all-sustaining hand. If it be enjoined in the Mosaic law, that even a beast shall not lie under the weight of his burden, but be helped up,† much more will our blessed Lord, in his tender love, hold out his hand to those who bear his cross, and support them when fainting under it. Of this timely relief all the followers of Christ may be assured. Let us therefore cheerfully take up that burden, which love will render easy and light.

2. It is not improbable that Simon the Cyrenian at first made some opposition; for it is said, they compelled him to bear the cross of Christ. This is an emblem of the backwardness of human nature in taking up the cross, and its fondness for ease, convenience, and

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* Zech. xii. 10, 14. † Exod. xxiii. 5.

worldly esteem. We daily show our desire to be excused from bearing the cross, and thereby confirm the observation of St. Paul, "That no chastening for the present is joyous, but grievous."* How willing soever the spirit may be, the flesh is generally weak; especially when the cross comes so unexpectedly as it did on Simon. But blessed be God, who has compassion on the infirmities of his children, and for Christ's sake will forgive these natural motions of self-love, if we do but earnestly strive against them, and pray to him for greater willingness under persecutions and sufferings. Let us imitate Simon, not in his reluctance to take up the cross; but in deriving strength from the fulness of Christ to overcome that reluctance. This man, seeing the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who suffered himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter, overcame the reluctance of nature; and not only submitted to bear the cross, but became, there is reason to hope, a true disciple. It is not improbable that Rufus and his mother, who are honourably mentioned by St. Paul in Romans, xvi. 13. may be the son and wife of Simon.—See Mark, xv. 21.

We shall hereafter consider the discourse of our blessed Saviour as he was led to his crucifixion. Far from being struck with terror and dejection, he performed this painful and ignominious walk with a composed presence of mind. Undoubtedly he conversed more with his heavenly Father in secret, than with men. No murmurings against his Father's decree escaped his lips, nor any imprecations, menaces, or invectives against his enemies.—The cross being taken from him, and laid upon Simon, our Lord made use of

* Hebrews, xii. 11.

this interval of relief, to address the women who lamented and bewailed him, and in their persons the whole Jewish nation, in the remarkable words which will be the subject of the following chapter.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, praised be thy name, who didst suffer thyself to be led away to death, that we might have entrance into life. We bless thee for sanctifying, in the person of Simon, the bearing of the cross, and for taking away its reproach and curse by having borne it thyself. Make us, we beseech thee, ready and willing to follow our leader withersoever he goeth. Teach us to set a proper value on the fellowship of thy sufferings, and in love to bear the burdens of others, that we may fulfil the law of Christ. Grant this, for thy name's sake; and bless, for our edification, those circumstances of thy meritorious passion, which we have now considered. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

" *But Jesus, turning unto the women, said, Daughters of*
" *Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and*
" *for your children. For behold the days are coming, in*
" *the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the*
" *wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave*
" *suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains,*
" *Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us! For if they*
" *do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in*
" *the dry?*"

THESE words are the last penitential discourse of the Lord Jesus; in which we shall consider,

First, The sense and meaning of the words.

Secondly, Their use and application.

I.

This last penitential sermon of the Son of God was directed to the daughters of Jerusalem, i. e. the women who lived at Jerusalem, or acknowledged it to be the holy city. A prodigious multitude of people accompanied our Lord to his crucifixion. Amongst the crowd, probably, were many foreign Jews and proselytes, who were at that time assembled from all parts of the world, on account of the Passover. Most of those who usually attend the execution of criminals, are drawn thither, merely to gratify an idle curiosity; and the greater part of the multitude, which followed Christ to Golgotha, cannot be supposed to have had any better motive.

Among this concourse of people were many women, some of whom had followed Jesus from Galilee, and others lived at Jerusalem. They lamented Jesus, as he went along, and not only shed tears, but expressed their grief by loud lamentations, and passionate gestures. They beheld the barbarity which the Roman soldiers exercised on our blessed Saviour. It was customary among the Romans to torment those who were to be crucified, as they went to the place of execution, by pushing them to and fro, beating them with their fists and with clubs, and sometimes strewing sharp stones and nails under their feet. As this was the usual way of treating such criminals, it is hardly to be supposed that the soldiers, who hitherto had used the sacred person of Christ with the utmost cruelty, would act otherwise on this occasion.—The compassionate concern of the women gave occasion to this address: turning about to them with looks full of pity and compassion, our Lord addressed them thus: "Weep not for me, ye daughters of Jerusalem, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Though our blessed Lord directs these words to the women, he addresses at the same time, in their persons, the whole house of Israel, as the rest of the multitude were within hearing. He spoke with particular emphasis, as the prophets usually did in their denunciations of God's approaching judgments.

Our Saviour's words contain

1. An admonition.

2. A denunciation of divine judgments.

3. An information of the true cause of those judgments.

1. In the admonition to the women, our Saviour forbids them to shed tears for him, and recommends

them to weep for themselves, and for their children. The prohibition is expressed in these words: "Weep not for me!" Not that he absolutely blames their tears, which were to be esteemed a public testimony of his innocence; and deserved the more regard, since by the Jewish laws, persons condemned to death by the Sanhedrim were not to be publicly lamented. But such was the grief of these women, that they were not afraid by their tears to condemn the unjust sentence passed by the chief priests. We do not, however, read that they were punished or insulted on this account; which might have been the case, had not these feeble witnesses of our Saviour's innocence been protected by a superior power.

But why should our blessed Lord forbid these women to weep for him? It was, *first*, because he perceived that those tears sprung from a mistaken pity. These compassionate daughters of Jerusalem only looked on Christ's outward wounds, pains, and ignominy, which excited in them a natural sympathetic feeling; but they had no idea of the true cause of these sufferings. They were not sensible that the sins of the world, and consequently their own, were to be laid on the head of this sacred victim; and that he was to offer them in his body on the cross; and thus publicly to make an atone- for them. *Secondly*, He forbids this weeping, because in his present circumstances he did not deserve any compassion. God himself hid his face from his only Son, when he became our substitute, and was loaded with the sins of the whole world. As a dejected sinner, whose conscience is awakened, accounts himself unworthy of any consolation or attention; so our Redeemer, being by the imputation of the sins

of the world, made a curse and expiatory sacrifice, accounts himself unworthy to receive any alleviation of his grief from the compassion of others. *Thirdly*, He forbids them to lament, because he knew that his short transitory sufferings would produce blessed fruits, and would conduce to the glory of God, and the eternal salvation of mankind; so that there was greater reason for joy than sorrow on this event.

On the other hand, our Lord advises them to weep for themselves, and for their children. In this exhortation he may allude to the imprecation which the people had uttered, at the instigation of the chief priests and elders: "His blood be upon us, and on our children." 'If you are to lament and shed tears, weep for yourselves, not only for your sins, which are the cause of my sufferings, but likewise for the dreadful calamities which some of you shall live to see, and which it behoves you betimes to deprecate by contrition and tears. Weep for your children, since on them the judgments of obduracy and unbelief shall come; they shall live to see the miseries of the nation, during the siege of Jerusalem, and shall perish in them. Alas! did you but know what dreadful judgments, both spiritual and temporal, are now hovering over the heads of your children, and with what rigour the divine vengeance will require my blood at your hands, you would certainly spare those tears which you now shed for me, and would deplore the wretchedness of your unhappy descendants; in denouncing whose calamities, I myself lately could not refrain from weeping.' * Upon this follows,

2. A particular denunciation of the approaching

* Luke, xix. 41.

judgments: "For behold the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us!"

In these words our Saviour foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, and the devastation of Judea, by the Romans, which he had before predicted upon several occasions. "Behold," saith our Saviour, "your house is left unto you desolate."* "For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another."† "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wiugs, and ye would not!"‡ "And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things! Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down!"§ And now, a few hours before his death, Jesus denounces these woes for the last time; and in order to set before the Jews in a clearer and more emphatical manner, the greatness of the misery which should come upon their children, he makes use of two figurative expressions, borrowed from the prophets.

First, Behold, the days are coming in the which they shall say, "Blessed are the barren," &c. Bar-

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* Luke, xiii. 35. † Luke, xix. 43. ‡ Matt. xxiii. 37.
§ Matt. xxiv. 1.

renness was accounted by the Jews as a curse and disgrace. Hence Rachael in the Old Testament, and Elizabeth in the New,* in the prospect of having offspring, praised God for taking away their reproach. Children were looked upon as a singular honour, and a mark of the divine favour. When Christ therefore declares that the time was coming, when barren women would be accounted much happier than those who had borne children, he intimates that a terrible day of vengeance was approaching; especially to fathers and mothers of families, whose personal calamities would be doubled by the misery of their children. The prophet Hosea, when he had a view, in the spirit, of the misery of the ten tribes under the Assyrian captivity, implores the Lord rather to give them no offspring, than suffer their children to be a cause of so much sorrow to the parents.† Hence, our Saviour had before denounced this woe to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "Woe unto them that are with child, and unto them that give suck in those days;"‡ when flight will be the only means of safety, and such persons will be less fit for it than others. Those unhappy women would doubly feel all the woes and calamities of the siege of Jerusalem, on account of their beloved offspring. This prediction was abundantly verified by the melancholy event: for in less than forty years after this woe was denounced, the day of vengeance came, attended with all its terrors. Among other miseries, which the inhabitants of Jerusalem suffered during the siege, they were oppressed with such intolerable famine, that some mothers ate their own children, and others saw

* Gen. xxx. 23.; Luke, i. 25. † Hosea, ix. 14. ‡ Matt. xxiv. 19.

their offspring pining with hunger, dying of the pestilence, cut to pieces, or dashed against the stones by the Roman soldiers.

2. Our Lord adds, "Then will they begin to say to the mountains, fall on us! and to the hills, cover us!" The prophet Hosea gives a pathetic representation of the wretchedness of the ten tribes, in similar words.* The prophet Isaiah, in his description of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, says, "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty."† In these words, borrowed from the prophetic writings, the Lord Jesus foretells the calamities which Jerusalem should endure, when attacked by the Romans; that their misery would be so great, that many families of distinction would leave their splendid houses, and fly with their wives and children to the caves of the mountains, to avoid the cruelty of the Roman army; and that hunger and cold would render those subterraneous retreats so insupportable to them, that they would long for death.

This prophecy, whether taken in a literal or figurative sense, was fully accomplished; for Josephus informs us, that on the approach of the Roman army the Jews fled in crowds to the mountains and hills, and wandered about or concealed themselves in caves, where, in all probability, most of them perished with hunger; others, weary of such a miserable life, ardently wished for death. Those who survived the destruction of Jerusalem were dispered into other countries, where they in vain sought for refuge; being persecuted every where by the wrath of God and of the Lamb. These

* Hosea, x. 8. † Isaiah, ii. 29.

heavy judgments the Son of God here publicly denounces, that the Jewish nation might be awakened to repentance, be roused from security, and moved by a true conversion to God, to avert his heavy displeasure. For this end,

3. He acquaints them with the true cause of such terrible judgments; "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" The prophet Hosea compares the Lord Jesus to a green and fruitful tree.* Christ is called in the Revelation of St. John, "The tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."† On the other hand, the impenitent Jews were as dry unfruitful trees, without any sap of spiritual life, and consequently could bring forth no fruit of repentance and grace. The cause of their approaching judgments was twofold. They rejected and crucified the Messiah; to which our Saviour alludes, in these words, "If they do these things in a green tree;" 'if they thus deal with me, who am innocent of the crimes laid to my charge.' This was the capital sin of the Jewish nation. They had already embrued their hands in the blood of many of the prophets: but now they filled up the measure of their iniquities, by putting to death the Son of God himself.—The other cause of their calamities was their obstinate impenitence; they wantonly abused the patience and long-suffering of God, and notwithstanding all the labours of the Baptist, of Christ himself, and of his Apostles, continued the same dead and unfruitful trees as before. Therefore they could expect nothing but the execution of that sentence, which Christ had long since denounced against them in a

* Hosea, xiv. 8. † Revel. ii. 7.

parable, viz. "Cut down [the barren fig-tree] why cumbereth it the ground."* "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."† Moreover our Lord, by these words, called upon the Jewish people to look on his sufferings, as foreshadowing the wrath which should come upon their city and nation. A green tree resists the fire; whereas a dry tree is quickly consumed. If then Christ, by nature a green and fruitful tree, was dried up by the fire of God's displeasure, on account of the sins of others imputed to him; if he was loaded with a curse, and, as it were, rooted out of the land of the living; much more would the unbelieving Jews, who were dead and barren trees, without any sap or spiritual life, be consumed by temporal and eternal judgments. It is recorded in history, that the Jews, who were besieged in Jerusalem, unable to hold out any longer against the miseries which raged within the city, went out in multitudes to surrender themselves prisoners. Their number being very great, Titus the Roman General ordered them to be executed. Great numbers after being tortured and scourged, were crucified before the city walls in frightful postures. According to Josephus, such vast numbers perished in this manner, that at length there was neither room to erect crosses near the walls, nor wood sufficient for crosses. Thus the divine retaliation manifested itself; for God permitted these dry and barren trees to suffer the same treatment which the green tree had received from them.

Having thus illustrated the sense and meaning of these words, let us, in the next place, turn our thoughts to a salutary application of them, and consider the ad-

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* Luke, xiii. 7. † Matt. iii. 19.

vantages which both impenitent and penitent souls may derive from their consideration.

1. Among the impenitent we class those who impiously despise the covenant of grace, and live in a total neglect of God's ordinances, and particularly of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; those who live in the open violation of the divine laws; regulating their lives by the pattern of the world, and imitating its example in the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life. Whatever the religious opinions of such may be, it does not alter their case; whether they are ignorant of the truths of religion, or have a knowledge of them, attended with conviction. Let every one examine himself; and if his conscience should accuse him, may he be the more ardently desirous to derive benefit from this last penitential sermon of our Lord.

In the first place, examine yourself, whether you have placed the whole of your religion in condemning Judas, the chief priests, and their officers, Pilate and his soldiers; in execrating their impiety; and in expressing a natural compassion for Christ, as an innocent and just man. Many there are, who from such emotions conclude themselves to be good Christians, and that their hearts are well disposed towards their Saviour; whereas they never gave any real proofs of their love to him or to his members; they are only hypocrites, and often enemies to the cross of Christ. Beware therefore, that you presume not on these as infallible marks of a state of grace: for as a mere natural tenderness of disposition often produces such effects, to be approved a true disciple of Christ you must go further. Consider these words of Christ: "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves!" Turn your eyes on yourself,

and in humble prayer to God, request the assistance of divine light, in searching your heart; and be assured, that if you neither flatter, nor wilfully deceive yourself, you will have cause to weep for your numberless sins. If God is pleased to grant you a thorough insight into your guilt, you will look on yourself as a dry, sapless, dead, and barren tree, without the least fruit of the Spirit, either pleasing to God, or beneficial to your neighbour; or, at most, with only a few leaves of an external profession of the truth, and observance of public worship. If under a conviction of your natural indisposition for any thing that is good, you lift up your eyes, and examine the threatenings of the law, and read how the divine justice threatens all dry and barren trees, the voice which says, "cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground," will speak terror to your guilty conscience. This alarm will be increased by reflecting, how the justice of God, on account of imputed sin, did not spare even Jesus Christ, the Tree of Life. Behold, God spared not his own Son, but visited on him the sins of the world, which he had consented should be imputed to him; and caused him to discharge to the utmost farthing, those debts for which he had become surety. As he took upon himself the whole burden of sin, so was he likewise obliged to bear the whole weight of God's displeasure. How did he tremble, when he was to drink the cup of bitter sufferings! How did the sanguine streams issue from his sacred body, and run down on the ground! How was he reviled, insulted, abused, mocked, and spurned by merciless hands! When you seriously consider, how your sins brought these sufferings upon him, your awakened conscience will make this inference, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in

the dry?" You will resemble a malefactor standing before his judge, to hear the sentence of death pronounced against him; and will feel something of that anguish of mind, which Christ describes in these words: "Then will they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us!" You will be ready, for fear of an offended God, to hide yourself, if it were possible, from his presence, in dens and caves of the earth, convinced that a wretch who has crucified the Son of God, is not worthy to walk on the earth, or behold the light of the sun.

It is a legitimate use of Christ's sufferings, to alarm and awaken the conscience, and we naturally begin with this method of considering them. The hardened sinner enjoys himself in full security, though he is the object of God's displeasure. He says, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart." We therefore present to his view the numerous instances recorded in scripture, which proclaim the divine justice, and teach that the Lord is greatly to be feared. In particular the heavy judgments which God poured on the Jews, afford a striking admonition. If God has not spared the natural branches, what assurance have we that he will spare us?* But never has God so awfully manifested his great anger against sin, as in the sufferings of his beloved Son. "Terror of mind, (says the pious Luther,) must necessarily arise from a consideration of the severe displeasure of God against sin, and his rigour in punishing sinners. Since he would not acquit his own beloved Son, to whom the sins of the world were imputed, without such a severe expiation,—since the beloved Child was thus chastened,

* Rom. xi. 21.

what will be done to actual sinners? Inexpressible must be that guilt, which required a person of such transcendent dignity to make satisfaction." Happy is he, who, from the sufferings of Christ, is filled with a salutary terror: who is induced to mourn for his sins, and to implore forgiveness. Such an one will have no occasion, in the day of wrath, to call on the mountains and rocks to fall on him, and hide him from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.*—And when the sinner is thus awakened from his carnal security, he ought in the next place to learn the advantage which a penitent soul may derive from the passage under consideration.

2. A penitent is one, who is deeply sensible of his own depravity, and the heavy wrath of God which his sins have deserved; who acknowledges himself a dry unfruitful tree, fit only for the fire; and who inwardly abhors and detests all sin, which caused the Tree of Life to be so ignominiously treated; who looks unto him whom he hath pierced, and mourns. If this, O man, be the state of thy mind, view thy merciful Redeemer turning to thee, and, with a look of tender affection, addressing himself to thee in these or like words: 'Weep not for me, poor sinner; for so glorious will be the consequences of my bitter sufferings, that thou hast cause to praise God for them. I have discharged the debt of thy sins; I have abolished the curse; I have inclined the heart of my Father to look on thee with love; I have obtained eternal life and salvation for thee. The punishment which thou didst deserve I have borne, that thou mayest have peace. Weep not therefore for me; for thyself indeed thou

* Revel. vi. 15.

mightest well weep, because of thy sins; but I am the messenger of the covenant, bringing thee pardon and grace from my heavenly Father. My blood cries not for vengeance like that of Abel; but continually intercedes for reconciliation between God and man. Therefore wipe thy overflowing eyes. I have counted thy tears, and these things are noted in my book. I have removed the sentence of condemnation denounced against thee at thy birth, and have renewed thee to eternal life. Thy mother therefore hath no cause to wish she had not borne thee.—Art thou for seeking safety among the rocks? I will hide thee from the wrath of God, and by my mediation thou shalt be in perfect security. Art thou afraid of being hewn down as a dry and barren tree, and therefore dreadest the axe of God's wrath? Know that I have suffered its stroke in thy stead. I have permitted myself to be rooted out of the land of the living, that thou mightest be spared. My spirit, which I pour upon thee, shall make thee green and flourishing; so that thou shalt be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth its fruit in its season. The name of my Father shall be glorified by thy bringing forth much fruit, and, after standing thy appointed time in the garden of my church on earth, I will transplant thee to my heavenly Paradise, where thou shalt flourish in everlasting verdure, and thy leaf shall not wither!'

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! thanks be to thee for this thy last penitential sermon. Impress it deeply on our hearts by thy Holy Spirit. May all sleeping consciences be roused and awakened to a sincere repentance. Spare,

we beseech thee, those barren trees which thou still findest among us, and by thy quickening power make them fruitful in good works. As for those whom thou had already quickened, give them to abound in the fruits of faith and love, that the name of thy Father may be glorified in them. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS.

" *And they bring him unto a place, called in the Hebrew,*
" *Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a*
" *skull. And they gave him to drink vinegar* [*or sour*
" *wine*] *mingled with myrrh and gall: and when he had*
" *tasted thereof, he would not drink; and he received it*
" *not. And they crucified him there, and two other male-*
" *factors with him; one on the right hand, and the other*
" *on the left, and Jesus in the midst. And the scripture*
" *was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with*
" *the transgressors. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive*
" *them; for they know not what they do.*

In these words we have an account of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

The place of his crucifixion was Mount Golgotha. Golgotha, or the place of a skull, and probably derived that name from the skulls of those who had there been put to death. How must the soul of the Son of God have been affected, as he ascended this hill, covered with crowds of spectators rejoicing at his ignominious death! What a contrast was there between this ascent

to Golgotha, and his former descent on Mount Sinai, when he was attended by hosts of adoring angels, and displayed his glory to the people of Israel!

The evangelists further observe, that two malefactors were crucified with him, one on his right hand, the other on his left. Probably, this was at the instigation of the Jewish Rulers, to cast the greater contempt on our Saviour, and to make the people imagine, that he was guilty of crimes more heinous than either of the two malefactors. Here we may remark,

1. That it was a place without the walls of the city. Jerusalem was then accounted the metropolis of the people of God, where the Deity in a peculiar manner resided. Jesus was therefore led out of the city to the place of malefactors, to show that he was excluded from the presence of God, and the fellowship of his people. He was to bear our curse, and by being cast out of the earthly Jerusalem, was to make us free denizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. Besides, it did not seem proper, that the great sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the whole world, should be offered up within the walls of the Jewish metropolis, like a Levitical offering. An open place, not confined within walls, better suited an universal sacrifice.

2. It was an unclean place, polluted with the blood of malefactors; a place, where death, as it were, had set up his standard. Here the Prince of life was to attack and overcome death in his own camp and dominion, and to swallow him up in victory.

3. This Mount Golgotha was a part of Mount Moriah, on which Isaac, that glorious type of Christ, was to have been sacrificed, and where Abraham received a singular demonstration of divine favour. In

this very place the great antitype, the true Isaac, the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, was slain, and by that circumstance an illustrious pledge was given of God's watchful care over his church.

4. It was a high place; agreeable to the prediction, that Christ should be lifted up as an ensign to the nations. As Moses and Aaron both died on an eminence, so here, the true High Priest of the new covenant, and the supreme lawgiver, was to do the same.

5. Our blessed Saviour was also crucified between two malefactors, that these words of Isaiah, "He was numbered with the transgressors,"* might, (as St. Mark observes,) receive their literal accomplishment. That we, who are evil doers, might be numbered among the just, the Holy One of God was numbered among transgressors.

6. That the place of the crucifixion was without the walls of Jerusalem, and that Jesus went up to it out of the city, is mentioned by St. Paul, who observes in his Epistle to the Hebrews, that Jesus has thereby fulfilled the type of the sin-offering, instituted in the Old Testament. "The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the High Priest for sin, are burnt without the camp."† Hence he draws this conclusion: "Wherefore Jesus, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." As the blood of the sacrifices on the great day of atonement was brought into the sanctuary, and their bodies were burned without the city; so Jesus, who also suffered without Jerusalem,

* Isaiah liii. 12. † Heb. xiii. 11.

is the true sacrifice of atonement; and his blood was carried into the heavenly sanctuary for the atonement of the sins of the whole world. From this circumstance the Apostle draws this inference: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." By going forth without the camp, is denoted a departing from the Jewish religion, which was at that time extremely corrupt, and from all its outward ceremonies, which were superseded by Christ. The Apostle exhorts the converted Hebrews, that they should no longer adhere to types and shadows; but relinquishing the Jewish worship, acknowledge Christ to be the only High Priest, and his sacrifice the only atonement. He advises them to appropriate that propitiatory sacrifice to themselves by faith unto salvation, though they might on that account be partakers of the reproach of Christ. By going forth unto Christ without the camp, the Apostle also exhorts us to depart from all the sinful ways of the world, which do not agree with our profession, as followers of a crucified Saviour. Let us then come out from the world, which lieth in wickedness. Let us depart from the company of the wicked, where the blood of the Son of God is trampled under foot. Let us go forth from the Sodom of those carnal delights, which are not consistent with our holy profession. Let us go forth to Christ, that we may bear his reproach, and be partakers of his sufferings. Though the world should ridicule us, and look down on us with contempt; though we should be numbered among transgressors; Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, has already sanctified these hardships by his sufferings. To those who believe in him, and suffer for his name, he has made reproach and sufferings the steps to glory. It should therefore be our fixed resolution, rather to

die with him on Golgotha, than to deny his truth, and be ashamed of his reproach.

2. We come, in the next place, to consider the preparation made for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, by giving him a disagreeable and bitter potion. For after having with great difficulty brought the blessed Jesus, now wearied and quite spent, to Mount Golgotha, they endeavoured to make him drink vinegar, or sour wine. It was customary among the Jews to give those who were to suffer a violent death, a rich cordial of wine mixed with spices. This custom might be derived from these words of Solomon: "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those of a heavy heart; let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."* The Jews used to put a few grains of frankincense into this liquor, that the sufferer might be the less sensible of the pains of dissolution. This custom was here so far observed, that liquor was offered to Jesus to drink before his crucifixion; but the indulgence was inhumanly abused, for, instead of a cordial, the liquor offered to Christ was bitter and distasteful. Whether the Jews themselves mixed this liquor, or whether the Roman soldiers did it at their instigation, it betrayed the malice and cruelty of our Saviour's enemies.

But let us inquire how the Lamb of God behaved on this occasion. The evangelists inform us, that "When he had tasted thereof he would not drink;" so that "he received it not." He tasted this bitter draught, and permitted some drops to moisten his parched mouth; but he refused to drink it.

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* Proverbs, xxxi. 6, 7.

We are not, however, to suppose that our blessed Saviour refused this cup out of mere delicacy, because the taste displeased him. We observed above, that intoxicating liquors were offered to malefactors before they were executed, to throw them into a state of stupor, and to make them less sensible of the pangs of death; but this was not to be the case with our blessed Saviour. He did not desire to lessen his sufferings; but was willing to feel them to the last instant, and for us to taste death in all its bitterness.* He was induced by the most exalted love, to offer up himself to his Father, and voluntarily to lay down his life in the hour which he had appointed. He was resolved to preserve his soul in serenity; he had still several important things to say on the cross, and many remarkable prophecies of scripture to fulfil. If his enemies therefore intended to have deprived him of his senses, this expectation was baffled, by his declining to drink the liquor. Hence we may learn the following truths.

1. The men of this world are loth to render the smallest and most ordinary kind offices to the members of Christ; and when they are under the unavoidable necessity of doing them, they take care that their cordials shall be mingled with gall, and under the specious appearance of doing good, they endeavour to molest and afflict the children of God. To such hardships his people must inure themselves. They may be assured, that instead of any comfort from the world, all they have to expect is reproach. Their Chief fared no better, and they are to expect similar treatment.

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* Hebrews, ii. 9.

2. Christ, by tasting this nauseous potion, was to expiate the voluptuous delicacy of our taste, and to acquire for us the privilege of partaking of the cup of divine consolations. He did not indeed drink this liquor; but he tasted it, and consequently experienced its bitterness. Sin, and the curse which it entails, are frequently compared in scripture to gall, vinegar, wormwood, and other distasteful things. Hence the prophet says, "Ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock."* Hence, also, the scripture attributes to God, a cup of fury or trembling, the dregs of which all the ungodly shall wring out and drink.† The Lord also threatens sinners by his prophet. "I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."‡ This bitterness, which would have been our eternal potion, our Mediator has once tasted, in order thereby to expiate the sins of the penitent, to administer to them divine comfort at the hour of death, and to give them an antepast of eternal felicity. Therefore, reflect ye, who still drink the intoxicating cup of Satan, what the blessed Jesus suffered, to obtain for you a right to the grace of God, and his consolations. Oh forbear greedily to drink iniquity like water. § It will cause woe and bitterness, perhaps in this world, and in the next, assuredly torture without end! Be not afraid of the bitter gall of godly sorrow, which is far preferable to the false peace of sinful pleasures. Is it not better to mourn for a short time, than to grieve for ever? Is it not better here to drink a bitter potion in the fellowship of Christ, and afterwards to be eter-

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* Amos, vi. 12. † Psalms, lxxv. 9.; Isaiah, li. 17.
‡ Jeremiah, ix. 15. § Job, xvi. 15.

nally exhilarated with the delights of paradise, than to be intoxicated with the cup of sin?—You, who have tasted the love of God, and the sweetness of his consolations, remember that you owe it to that bitterness of suffering, which your Mediator tasted in your stead. Let this consideration move you to a more ardent love of him, who has emptied your cup of its bitterness, and alleviated your afflictions, by mingling with them the sweets of his enlivening comforts.

3. In the next place, we are to consider the crucifixion itself. St. John, who was present, thus describes this transaction: "Where they crucified him." It seems as if this evangelist, when about to describe the transaction, was so affected with the melancholy subject, that love to his divine master would not suffer him to dwell upon particulars. The Roman manner of crucifying was as follows. The cross being first raised perpendicularly, and firmly fixed in the ground, the criminal who was to be fastened on it was stripped naked, and so exposed to public view. The soldiers lifted him on a piece of timber,* which projected from the erect beam of the cross, like a seat, and placed him on it, so that the legs hung down on each side. Then they proceeded to streteh out the upper part of the body, and to extend both arms; and having first bound them to the transverse beam of the cross, secured them by large iron nails, driven through the

* Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho, in describing the parts of the cross, speaks of a piece of wood, ἐν μεσῳ πηγνομενον, ως κερας και αυτο εξεχον, εφ ω εποχενται οι ϛαυρωμενοι. Irenæus writes to the same effect; and the testimony of both is worthy of full credit, because in their time, the punishment of crucifixion was still in use. The same method is alluded to in the mode of expression of several ancient writers; *ascendere crucem, insilere crucem,* &c.

palms of each hand. Lastly, the legs were stretched out; and being placed close to each other, each of them was separately nailed to the perpendicular beam of the cross.

This punishment was ignominious. The Roman laws ordered none to be crucified but the worst of malefactors, who were deemed unworthy to tread on the earth; and the divine law annexes a particular execration to this punishment, for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." * The punishment was likewise extremely painful. The criminal was previously scourged; and when his garments were taken off, they tore open the wounds. The whole body was so strained, that the bones were almost dislocated, and the ribs became distinctly visible. † The piercing of the hands and feet, was also calculated to occasion excruciating pains; and after all, the body, torn by scourges and pierced by the nails, remained for some hours slowly bleeding to death, and languishing under inexpressible torture.

What an astonishing humiliation is this! that the Lord of glory should take on him such a painful and ignominious death, and be obedient to his Father, even to the death of the cross; that those hands should be pierced, which had healed so many impotent and sick; that the King of Israel should be an abomination, and the Son of God become a curse!

Upon these circumstances let us observe, that as the place where our Lord was crucified was not chosen without God's direction; so neither was the punishment of crucifixion appointed without the wisest views.

1. It aptly represented Christ's mediatorial office.

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* Deut. xxi. 23.; Gal. iii. 13. † Psalms, xxii. 17.

As he here hung between heaven and earth, so he was that adorable person who was to reconcile both, and to make peace between mankind and the offended Majesty of heaven.

2. By this lingering punishment, our Saviour's patience, resignation, and obedience, were most fully tried; and his inconceivable love to the human race displayed to the admiration of angels and men.

3. By reason of the curse annexed to this death, it was the best adapted to him who was to be made a curse, to obtain for us a blessing; and by such an ignominious and painful death, the justice of God and his extreme hatred of sin were signally manifested.

4. It was a punishment by which the blood of Christ, which was to be our ransom, and to purify our consciences from dead works, was abundantly shed.

5. The wisdom of God had before, by many types and prophecies in the Old Testament, signified, that the Messiah was to die by this mode of punishment. The prophecies of David * and Zechariah † were particularly fulfilled by our Saviour's crucifixion. The offering of Isaac, the erection of a Brazen Serpent, the Paschal Lamb, and indeed all sacrifices, which were lifted up, and laid on the altar, were types which prefigured the death of Christ on the cross. Our Lord himself had prophesied that the Son of man should be lifted up: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he spake, signifying what death he should die." ‡ Let us humbly adore the infinite wisdom of God, which appointed this punishment to be inflicted on our

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* Psalms, xxii. † Zech. xii. 10. ‡ John, xii. 32, 33.

Mediator. Let us admire the Father's unspeakable love, in thus giving up his only begotten Son to the most ignominious death. Let us also gratefully revere the transcendent love of the Son, in descending from the throne to die on the cross, and humbling himself beyond the comprehension of men or angels.

Further: The crucifixion of Christ is to be accounted the most important part of his sufferings.

By our Saviour's suffering on the tree, the sin of our first parent committed at the tree of knowledge, and the innumerable transgressions which have been the consequences of his fall, are expiated. Oh wonderful love! worthy subject of our continual meditations, and deserving our most grateful acknowledgments! So deep a humiliation, so low an abasement of a person of such transcendent dignity, must necessarily be productive of glorious and wonderful effects. On this cross our reconciliation was achieved! * On this cross, peace was concluded between heaven and earth. † On this cross, the hand-writing that was against us, was cancelled, blotted out, and taken away. ‡ On this cross, the curse was repealed, and the blessing obtained. § This cross is, as it were, the ladder by which man ascends to heaven, and the throne of grace where the sinner finds pardon and forgiveness. This is the triumphal car of the commander in chief of God's host. Here he triumphed over sin, which he bore in his own body on the tree. Here he triumphed over the power of Satan, whose head was bruised by the heel of Him, who trod the old serpent under foot. Here he triumphed over the curse of the Law, and placed his redeemed in perfect security.

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* Eph. ii. 16. † Coloss. i. 20. ‡ Coloss. ii. 14. § Gal. iii. 13, 14.

Here he extended his arms, to gather in and embrace all the truly penitent; saying, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Let us learn from our blessed Saviour's crucifixion, to crucify the old man, and to mortify self-conceit, self-love, and every inordinate desire. Henceforth the world must be crucified unto us; and the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, must be as loathsome in our eyes as an executed malefactor. Henceforth we must harbour no sinful thoughts, no vicious desires, which are displeasing to our crucified Saviour. Henceforth the reproach of Christ must be our glory, and his cross the standard under which we must live and die. We must say to our Redeemer, as faithful Ittai did to David, "As the Lord liveth, surely in what place my Lord the King shall be, whether in life or death, even there also will thy servant be." * Oh blessed fellowship of the cross, the consequence of which is a fellowship of glory!

4. We come now, in the last place, to consider our blessed Saviour's intercession for his enemies. He cried out, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." These words probably were uttered while the Roman soldiers were extending his body, and nailing it to the cross. While the hands of his murderers were thus engaged, he, as a merciful High Priest, is employed in praying for them, and interceding with the justice of God to pardon them: "Father, forgive them." How properly does Jesus here use the endearing title of Father, when by the most generous love of his enemies he so gloriously resembles his heavenly Father, whose good-

* 2 Sam. xv. 21.

ness extends to the unthankful, and to the evil.* He intercedes with his heavenly Father, that he would forgive these his blind unthinking creatures the grievous sin which they were now committing against his beloved Son, and that he would grant them time and grace for repentance. "They know not what they do." As some alleviation for the act, he alledges their ignorance, and supplicates his Father to look on these wretched men with eyes of compassion, to pity their want of understanding, and to bring them out of their blindness and ignorance into the light of the gospel. Behold a prophet far surpassing Moses in meekness and gentleness! Behold a gracious monarch, who takes more delight in pardoning and forgiving, than in exercising rigour and severity! Behold a merciful High Priest, who has compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way;† and who, even when he is on the point of offering himself up for a sacrifice, prays that his enemies may have the fruits of his atonement!

As these words of our blessed Saviour proceeded from the most fervent love and affection, they should leave behind them a salutary impression on our hearts, and serve as a blessed encouragement to draw sinners to the arms of his mercy; those sinners who are, as it were, within the jaws of death; who have proceeded so far as to seem past hopes of mercy; those sinners who have received mercy, but forfeited it again; and the people of the Lord, who are conscious of many sins and infirmities. Blessed is the man whom gratitude to his crucified Saviour constrains to renounce sin and its accursed service, and to offer him

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* Luke, vi. 28. † Heb. v. 2.

self up to Him who not only loved his own, but also his very enemies.

PRAYER.

We adore thy love, O merciful Saviour, which humbled thee even to the cross, that thou mightest exalt us to the throne of God. Praised be thy name, that for us rebels thou didst vouchsafe to become a curse, that the stream of divine blessings might flow upon us. Be thou for ever praised, who didst condescend to be raised on the cross, as the great antitype of the brazen serpent which was lifted up in the desert, that all who look on thee in faith may be healed and live.* O fulfil in us thy promise, that after thy exaltation, thou wouldest draw all men after thee!† Draw to thy cross the carnal, the secure, and the licentious; and convince them, that without crucifying their lusts, they can have no share in the blessings which thou didst procure by thy crucifixion. Draw to thy cross, troubled, anxious, and timorous consciences, and heal them by the salutary view of thy sufferings. Draw to thy cross thy true disciples, and grant that they may more and more increase in grace and wisdom, and in the knowledge of thee. O gather together those who are scattered abroad, far from thee and the light of thy gospel, and embrace them with the arms of thy mercy. Amen.

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* John, iii. 14. † John, xii. 32.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REMARKABLE OCCURRENCES WHICH FOLLOWED THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

" *And Pilate wrote a superscription of his accusation, and*
" *put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of*
" *Nazareth, the King of the Jews. This title then read*
" *many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was cru-*
" *cified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew,*
" *and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of*
" *the Jews unto Pilate, Write not, the King of the Jews;*
" *but that he said, I am the King of the Jews. Pilate*
" *answered, What I have written, I have written. Then*
" *the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his*
" *garments, and made four parts, (to every soldier a part,)*
" *and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven*
" *from the top throughout. They said therefore among*
" *themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose*
" *it shall be. And they cast lots upon it what every man*
" *should take; that the scripture might be fulfilled, which*
" *saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my*
" *vesture did they cast lots. These things therefore the*
" *soldiers did. And sitting down, they watched him there;*
" *and it was about the third hour when they crucified*
" *him.*"

In these words we have an account of two remarkable occurrences, which happened at our Lord's crucifixion;

First, The putting up a title or superscription on the cross.

Secondly, The dividing our Saviour's garments.

I.

Concerning the title of our crucified Saviour, the following circumstances are mentioned by the evangelists.

1. The author of it was Pilate. "Pilate wrote a superscription," i. e. he gave orders that it should be written and fixed to the cross. Pilate in this particular acted according to custom. It was usual amongst the Romans for the cause of the malefactor's punishment to be written on a tablet, which was carried before him when he was led to execution; and after the malefactor was fastened on the cross, the superscription was placed over the head of the criminal.

2. The words of this superscription are mentioned; and these specified the pretended crime for which Christ suffered death. Our blessed Saviour had indeed been charged, both before the spiritual court and the civil judge, with many crimes, not one of which could be proved; but Pilate, in the superscription, confined himself to that article of the accusation, which the Jews had mostly insisted on before his judgment-seat. The capital crime alledged against the Lord Jesus before Pilate was, that he said he was Christ, a king; and when Pilate afterwards laboured to release him, being sufficiently convinced of his innocence, the Jews upbraided him in these words: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." When Pilate afterwards brought Jesus out, and exhibited him to the people, saying, Behold your king; the Jews publicly declared that they had no king but Cæsar, and insisted with loud voices, that he should be crucified, as a pretender to the sovereign power. Pilate

therefore having delivered Jesus to be crucified, gave orders for inscribing this on the tablet as the cause of his crucifixion. The superscription was, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Pilate seems also to have designed by this title to expose the Jews, and ridicule their expectation of a king.

3. It was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. It was written in Hebrew, because that was the vernacular tongue of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, where our Saviour was crucified. It was written in Greek, because that language was become very common all over the East, since the time of Alexander, and was particularly spoken by those Jews who were dispersed among the Gentiles, and of whom great numbers were now at Jerusalem, on account of the feast. It was also written in Latin, because Judea was then a Roman province, and consequently under the dominion of the Roman emperors, who in their laws and edicts made use of that language. It is probable, that there were few persons then at Jerusalem, who could not read this superscription in one or other of these three languages.

4. A dispute is mentioned, which arose between Pilate and the Jews concerning this title. As the place where Jesus was crucified was near Jerusalem, a great number of Jews resorted thither, and read the superscription of our Saviour's accusation. It may be supposed, that when so famous a prophet, the fame of whose doctrines and miracles had spread over the country, was hanging on the cross between two malefactors, it must have occasioned many surmises, and awakened in the minds, both of foreigners and inhabitants, a curiosity to know the cause of so strange a catastrophe. The chief priests, observing that various remarks were made by the spectators on the

title "This is the King of the Jews," enter their protest against the superscription, and desire the governor will order it to be taken down, and another to be set up in its place. They could not digest the assertion which it contained; since to style a crucified malefactor their king, seemed an affront to the Jewish nation. Therefore they request that instead of "the King of the Jews," it should be written, "*He said*, I am the King of the Jews." 'Jesus did indeed pretend to be the king of the Jews; but we are so far from acknowledging him as such, that, as loyal subjects to the Roman emperor, we have caused him to be crucified.'

The chief priests however met with a repulse on this occasion. Pilate, who was naturally churlish, and was also chagrined and disgusted at the tumult raised by the Jews, refused to comply with their demands, and made this abrupt answer: "What I have written, I have written:"—'What has been written by my command I will abide by; I shall not alter a single tittle to humour you, who ought to be satisfied with having obtained your principal design.' The Jewish rulers thought they had got the power into their own hands, and that as they had awed Pilate into a compliance with their former demands, he would be always their submissive servant. On this occasion, however, Pilate put on the imperious air of a governor, who would not be dictated to; a resolution which he ought to have shown before. But the hand of God was in this transaction; and he already began to rebuke the enemies of Christ, and to abate their exultations at his death by this disappointment. In fact, all the circumstances of the superscription were directed by the divine will. If Pilate had his political views, God in his wisdom per-

mitted and ordered it. For it is said in the Acts of the Apostles,* that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, did against Jesus what the hand and counsel of God had before determined to be done.

1. This superscription was overruled, to be a remarkable testimony to our Saviour's spotless character and divine mission. No guilt appeared in this holy and innocent person, and Pilate could not charge him with any crime in the writing. It likewise contained a testimony to his divine mission; for here JESUS hung on the cross; Jesus who was to save his people from their sins; of whom all the prophets testified, that they who believed in him should obtain remission of their sins; and of whom they predicted, that he should be called a Nazarene: he was therefore to bear this this title, JESUS OF NAZARETH. The title, KING OF THE JEWS, alludes to the writings of the prophets, where the promised Messiah is described as a King: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and A KING shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness."† "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion! Shout O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy KING cometh unto thee!"‡ Therefore, according to the language of the prophets, this title was the same as if it had been expressed, "This is Jesus the Messiah." Moreover, as this royal title was fixed upon the cross, it denotes that his kingdom is not a worldly kingdom, but the kingdom of the cross; and that the preaching of the

* Chap. iv. 27, 28. † Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. ‡ Zech. ix. 9.

cross should be the means by which this kingdom should be established among Jews and Gentiles. Other sovereigns at their demise are deprived of their dignity, and leave their power to others; but this King obtained even in death a glorious triumph over his enemies; and of him it may be said, that he did not take possession of his kingdom till after his decease. Further; as this title was written in the three languages which were then most known in the world, we are to understand that Jesus was not only the king of the Jews, but was to be a king over the whole Israel of God, which was to be gathered together from all people, nations, and languages. That Pilate, a person of distinction, and the Roman governor of the province, should himself cause the superscription to be thus written, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," was a prophetic intimation that Pagan rulers and governors would acknowledge Christ to be the Lord. And the objection which the Jewish rulers made against this title, may intimate the opposition which the doctrine of Jesus being the Messiah and King of Israel, should afterwards meet with from the unbelieving Jews.

2. The same omnipotent hand which directed Pilate in drawing up the superscription, also restrained him from giving way to the Jews, who wanted an alteration in this title. For, since it was to serve as a declaration of our Saviour's character, the Jews were by no means to be gratified, who were for charging him as an impostor, and requested Pilate to write, "That he said, I am the King of the Jews." Now, though this was in some measure true, Christ having openly declared that he was a king, yet it would thus have appeared as if he had falsely pretended to that dignity. The

title therefore remained without change, like the kingly dignity of Christ, which is everlasting and unchangeable. Though the world exert itself in noise and tumult, and though Jews and Gentiles join together in council, and use their united efforts to shake off the yoke of this Almighty King; yet, as the Psalmist prophesies, their combined efforts to dethrone that King, whom God has anointed, will at last turn to their own confusion.

3. Whoever will acknowledge Jesus to be his Saviour, and expect to be saved by him, must resolve to take up his cross. How many are industrious in endeavouring to separate Christ and the cross! A Saviour they would readily embrace; but not a Saviour who will lay the cross on them. How few can adopt the language of St. Paul: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" * Yet the cross is now rendered honourable; since Christ our Saviour hung on it, with the kingly title fastened over his sacred head; and whoever owns the crucified Jesus as his king, must also be willing to enter into the fellowship of his reproach. Jesus, as we have seen, was in the title, termed a king; yet behold him in reproach and ignominy, hanging betwixt heaven and earth. Thus believers likewise are styled kings and priests to God; and yet how despicable does this kingly dignity appear in the eyes of the world! During the Pagan persecutions it was usual, in leading a martyr to execution, to carry before him a tablet, on which was written the cause

* Gal. vi. 14.

of his death, in these words: "This a Christian."* If we had lived in those times, should we have been ready to profess ourselves Christians? It is to be feared, that if the consequence of such a declaration were death, many of us would have hesitated. Yet did our Saviour for our sakes undergo such a weight of sufferings; and shall we not for his sake, and for the confession of his kingdom, endure the reproach of that world, which still hates his cause and people?

4. As God can so incline the hearts of his enemies as to make them subservient to his decrees, we, who are under his protection, ought to lay aside all fear of man. What a remarkable proof was it of God's power in turning the heart, that Pilate should write the truth unknowingly; and should, as it were, proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in three different languages! This should be an assurance to believers, that all things are over-ruled by their heavenly Father; and that even the devices and schemes of their enemies shall terminate in promoting his decrees. Evil men and spirits are under his controul; and, even against their will, must execute what God has appointed.

5. When the cause of Christ seems to be in the greatest danger, then God most eminently displays his glory. The enemies of Christ expected, when he was fastened to the cross, that they should bear down all before them. But behold! while Jesus was yet hanging on the cross, God begins to glorify his name

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*Eusebius, in the 5th Book of his Ecclesiastical History, relates, that a tablet was carried before the martyr Attalus, as he was led round the amphitheatre, with the inscription: *Hic est Attalus Christianus.*

by directing Pilate to say, "What I have written, I have written." The case is still the same: when things seem irretrievable, God draws a line, and sets bounds to the desire of the wicked, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come but no further; here shall thy proud waves be stayed."*

II.

We proceed to consider the second remarkable circumstance which happened at the crucifixion; namely, the dividing of our Saviour's garments. The account of this circumstance presupposes, that Jesus was stripped of his garments before he was lifted up on the cross. Neither the pain, nor the ignominy with which this indignity was attended, caused the Lamb of God to make any resistance. He patiently submitted to be exposed naked before the assembled multitude; he was stripped of every thing; and as the Apostle saith, "he became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be rich."†

The Lord Jesus being thus fastened to the cross, his clothes, according to the usage of the Romans, fell to the lot of the soldiers who had performed the execution. His garments were two; namely, a large upper robe, which came down to the feet, according to the eastern custom, and under this, a close vest. St. John, who was present on Mount Golgotha, relates the manner in which the soldiers proceeded in dividing each of these robes. Of the upper garment they made four parts, to every soldier a part. Some commentators have observed, that such garments were

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* Job, xxxviij. 11. † 2 Cor. viii. 9.

made of four pieces sewed together, and therefore might be very conveniently thus divided. As for the close vest or coat, as it did not consist of several pieces sewed together, but was woven without any seam, they would not rend it, but cast lots whose it should be. By this division of our Saviour's garments that remarkable scripture was fulfilled, in which David introduces the Messiah making this complaint: "They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots."* This prophecy, which even the ancient Jewish church understood of the Messiah, was now fulfilled; and its accomplishment is here mentioned by St. John. If our Saviour's garments had been only divided, it might be said, that this was no more than David might very easily have conjectured; it being customary, almost in every country, for the clothes of executed criminals to fall to the executioner. But how could David, from mere conjecture, foretell, that lots would be cast for the Messiah's vesture? This circumstance entirely depended on the choice of the Roman soldiers; and yet the Holy Spirit caused it to be predicted many hundred years before; that, by the accomplishment of it, we might be assured that these things did not fall out fortuitously. No one that lived in the time when this prophecy was delivered in the Old Testament, would have thought that it would so long after be fulfilled, thus literally, and in the very order of the words as delivered by the Psalmist. Yet who could have less intention of fulfilling the scripture than these soldiers, who did not so much as know that any such occurrence had been foretold by the

* Psalms, xxii. 18.

prophet! Thus the divine wisdom directs circumstances in such a manner, that men unknowingly fulfil what he has determined; and yet not by compulsion, but still retaining a free agency. St. John, who was an eye-witness of the whole transaction, breaks out into an exclamation of wonder: "These things, therefore, the soldiers did!" Luther, in his explanation of the 22d Psalm, has a remarkable passage on this proceeding. "It is my opinion," says he, "that the soldiers did not divide our Saviour's garments for the sake of any profit or advantage, but merely by way of ridicule and jest; as a token that all was over with Jesus, and that he was lost and destroyed, extinct, and utterly forgotten, as the basest and most contemptible of men. Therefore they not only deprive him of life, but would not let his friends or relations have even his clothes for a memorial of him. These miscreants neither expected that he would rise again, nor were afraid that his death would be avenged by his heavenly Father."

The soldiers, after they had divided his garments, sat by the cross, and watched the Lord Jesus. This was the Roman custom; for it was usual to set one or two soldiers, and sometimes more, to watch such as were crucified, lest their friends should carry them off. Some are of opinion, that a stronger force than usual was appointed to watch our Saviour on the cross, at the solicitation of the chief priests; yet, by the divine superintendence, this precaution served only to confirm before all the people, the reality, first of his death, and afterwards of his resurrection.

Let us now turn our eyes to the Lord Jesus; who has both atoned for our sins, and acquired grace for us by his behaviour on this occasion.

1. He has expiated the loss of the divine image, and of that glorious innocence bestowed on our first parents. Man was then pure from all inordinate desires and evil propensities, so that he was not ashamed of his nakedness; for he knew no sin, and consequently experienced no shame. This invaluable jewel we lost in Adam, at his fall. But Christ has obtained for us a garment to cover the nakedness of our souls. This was prefigured by the coats of skins, which God provided for our first parents, after their eyes became opened, to perceive that they were naked. * Jesus Christ himself, is in scripture represented as a garment, which we are to put on; "Put ye on the Lord Jesus." † "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." ‡ The scriptures speak of "a garment of salvation, and a robe of righteousness." § The righteousness of Christ is his perfect obedience, by which he has fulfilled whatever the sinner was to have done to acquire a right to eternal life; and suffered all that the sinner was to have suffered, by making atonement to divine justice. Now, as this righteousness is imputed by God to the penitent sinner, and accepted by him through faith; so it may very properly be compared to a garment, since it is of the same use to the soul, as a garment is to the body, both cherishing and adorning it. The righteousness of Christ covers the nakedness of the soul, and protects it against the divine wrath. ‖ It is such a glorious ornament, that, in this dress, the believer need not be ashamed to appear before the throne of God, and to have fellowship with the

* Gen. iii. 21. † Rom. xiii. 14. ‡ Gal. iii. 27. § Isa. lxi. 10.
‖ Psalms, xxxii. 1.; Rev. iii. 18.

citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. But as the human body can receive no benefit from a garment without putting it on; so must the righteousness of Jesus Christ be put on, before it can cover, protect, and adorn the soul. And it is put on, when the soul by faith and love becomes united to Christ Jesus, and by obeying his precepts, brings forth the fruit of good living; so that putting on the Lord Jesus, includes both our justification and sanctification. In the justification of believers, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them at the divine tribunal, and received by them through faith; so that God no longer looks on them as they are in themselves, in their corrupt, sinful nature, but as they are in the Son of his love, in whom his soul is well pleased. In their sanctification, the spirit of Christ works in them an active righteousness. A true faith by which we put on Christ, must produce all the fruits of the spirit, and this is called in scripture "putting on the new man,* putting on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering."† Thus Christ obtained for us a robe of salvation; and by putting on the garment of our first-born Brother, we happily inherit the blessing. This garment, like the coat of the Lord Jesus, is not to be divided, but must be put on entire. Christ is not only made our righteousness, but likewise our sanctification;‡ and therefore they who desire his righteousness as a covering for sin, but deny his sanctifying power, and do not seek after holiness, have no part or lot in the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, our Mediator, by these ignominious circumstances, has sanctified the sufferings of his children

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* Ephes. iv. 24. † Colos. iii. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30.

in times of persecution, when they are destitute even of clothes and shelter, and their goods are withheld or taken away by the violence of strangers.

He has also sanctified a state of spiritual nakedness and desertion, when the soul lies without comfort, strength, tranquillity, or joy; and when all it has to rest on, is the word of divine promise.

Lastly, The Son of God, by this part of his sufferings, has left us an example. We must be ready, when God requires it, to be stripped of all temporal things, and to give our cloak to those who would take our coat, rather than sin, by revenging ourselves: we must suffer injustice, rather than do an injury.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour! we thank thee for the lessons which we have been taught from these circumstances attending thy passion. Praised be thy name, who by the title on the cross hast taught us, that even in death thou didst still remain our Saviour and our King. Make us partakers of those blessings, which thou hast procured for us. May we be truly sensible of the shame of our spiritual nakedness: may we know the insuffiency of our own righteousness, and desire to be clothed with thine; that, after being unclothed, and laying aside the garment of the flesh, we may be clothed upon and arrayed in the effulgent robe of heavenly glory, and find mortality swallowed up of life! Amen.

CHAPTER V.

THE MENTAL SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

"*And the people stood beholding; and they that passed by "reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou "that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, "save thyself; if thou be the Son of God, come down from "the cross. Likewise also, the chief priests, mocking him "with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, him-"self he cannot save. If he be the Christ, the king of "Israel, the chosen of God, let him save himself, and now "come down from the cross, that we may see it, and we will "believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him "now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of "God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, "and offering him vinegar; and saying, If thou be the "King of the Jews, save thyself. The thieves also, who "were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. And "one of the malefactors, who were hanged, railed on him, "saying, If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.*"

THE opprobrium and derision offered to Christ on the cross, may be considered as the crucifixion of his soul. For, if the nails that were driven through his hands and feet put him to sensible pain, these mockeries, insults, and invectives, must have occasioned still greater torture to his soul. David complains, that "as with a sword in his bones, his enemies reproach him, while they say daily unto him, Where is now thy God?" It is beyond our comprehension what the Son of David felt, when many tongues, set on fire of hell, discharged their mockeries against him. St. Paul

says of apostates, that "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame;" * and he may very justly be said to have been, as it were, crucified by those horrid blasphemies, revilings, and mockeries which he heard on the cross. During the sufferings of Christ; all descriptions of men had employed their tongues in persecution and torture. The tongue of Judas had betrayed him to his enemies by that hypocritical salutation, Hail, master! Peter had denied him with imprecations. False witnesses had slandered him. The high-priest, Caiaphas, and the other members of the Sanhedrim, had condemned him as a blasphemer, had falsely accused him before Pilate and Herod, and charged him with enormous crimes. The officers of the council had ridiculed his prophetical office, and the Roman soldiers his regal dignity. Herod had insulted him by impertinent and insolent questions. Pilate had pronounced sentence of death on him, and ordered him to be scourged and put to death. The whole Jewish people had cried, Crucify him! Crucify him! And now, when he was actually fastened on the cross, and the hands of his enemies could do no more, their envenomed tongues were the more virulent. The spirit of darkness who inspired them, now made his last attempt on the soul of our blessed Lord, who was to feel the wrath of God to the uttermost.

The persons who reviled our Saviour on the cross were, the people, the rulers of the Jews, the Roman soldiers, and the malefactors who were crucified with him.

1. The people who stood about the cross of Christ

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* Hebrews, vi. 6.

were guilty of this enormous sin. We have observed before, that our blessed Saviour was followed to the place of crucifixion by a great multitude. It is probable, that not only Mount Golgotha, but the adjacent eminences were covered with spectators; especially as Jerusalem was then filled with an immense concourse on account of the Passover. Then was seen in the great antitype, the accomplishment of what was typically done on the annual feast of atonement; for the whole congregation of the children of Israel stood round the high priest, when he offered the sacrifice for the sins of the people. Thus the High Priest over the house of God, at the time when he offered himself on the cross to his heavenly Father, was surrounded by a vast multitude; who, according to the divine decree, were to be witnesses of this universal sacrifice.

2. We also find involved in the guilt of reviling our Saviour, the rulers of the people; or, as they are specified by St. Matthew, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Thus the civil and ecclesiastical chiefs of the Jewish nation were present. These persons, on account of the approaching Passover, had, according to the law of Moses, affairs of a different nature requiring their attendance. Besides, this polluted place of execution ill suited the pretended scrupulous consciences of those who, but six hours before, would not set a foot within a Pagan court of justice, lest they should be defiled. But an inhuman rancour against Jesus had brought them hither, along with the rabble; and they were witnesses of the sufferings of Christ, and of the unexampled patience, mildness, and piety, which he displayed, to the confusion of these his enemies.

3. The Roman soldiers likewise shared in this guilt. St. Luke observes, that the soldiers also mocked him.

In the judgment-hall of Pilate, they had already committed several outrages against him, and vexed our Saviour's righteous soul by profane and contumelious reflections. Yet they were so far from having exhausted their malice, that they still made the crucified Jesus the object of their ridicule.

Lastly, "The thieves also, who were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth:" from which words one would be apt to conclude, that both the malefactors concurred in reviling our blessed Saviour. Yet St. Luke expressly says, one of them railed on him, but was rebuked by the other. Hence some have supposed, that the other also reviled him at first, but soon afterwards was seized with compunction, reproved his companion, and became a convert to our Lord.

We may observe,

1. That Christ suffered himself to be mocked and abused by all ranks of men, to deliver all from the spirit of mockery and abuse.

It is an awful consideration that all classes of spectators sharpened their tongues against the ever-glorious Son of God. He was mocked by Jews and Gentiles, by young and old, by the learned and ignorant, by teachers and hearers, by the priests and magistrates, by private men and soldiers. This was to expiate that corrupt inclination to mock and ridicule the most sacred persons and things, which has generally infected the human heart, and prevails in every rank, age, and sex. What St. Paul says of carnal men, namely, that the poison of asps is under their lips,* displayed itself in the mockeries and invectives, which were poured forth against our Lord. By patiently submitting to these

* Rom. iii. 13; Psalms, cxl. 3.

reproaches, he has procured forgiveness of such offences for all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who penitently acknowledge these heinous sins, heartily bewailing and sincerely abhorring them.

2. The same sins may be committed by different persons, and yet their respective degrees of guilt may be different. Here both Jews and Gentiles reviled and mocked our Saviour; but it is certain, that the Jews sinned much more grievously than the Gentiles; since they mocked that Jesus, whom they might have known to be the Messiah from the writings of the prophets. Besides, our Lord had hitherto conversed with and lived among them, and wrought many surprising miracles for the souls and bodies of their countrymen. They, as the peculiar people of God, should have set an example to the uncircumcised Gentiles. We find also that the chief priests mocked him, together with the people; but it is evident that the former were guilty of a greater crime than the latter. They had the key of knowledge, and, from the prophetical writings, ought to have been better informed concerning the Messiah's state of humiliation. They should have reproved the scoffing multitude, instead of exciting them by their example.

3. Punishment does not work amendment without the concurrence of divine grace. An instance of this is seen in one of the thieves, who, notwithstanding his sufferings, joined in mocking the blessed Jesus. If the severest punishments could ensure amendment, this malefactor would have been converted as well as the other. Yet the contrary effect not only happened in the instance before us, but may be observed daily. Even the terror of the sword, the gallows, or the wheel, is insufficient to convert a criminal, unless grace

interposes to change and mollify the heart. Nay it is often seen that profligate sinners are rather hardened than reformed, not only by temporal punishments, but even by divine chastisements. Such is the corruption of human nature; so deeply rooted in many is the love of sin! O that to none of us this complaint of the prophet may be applied: "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return." *

We come in the next place to consider the means used to aggravate our Lord's mental sufferings on the cross. "The people stood beholding, and the rulers also with them derided him." This melancholy spectacle was an entertainment to many of them; and their eyes, which ought to have wept on account of the pain and torture which the Lord of Glory endured, sparkled with malignant joy at his bitter pains. It is usual for persons to express a concern for a malefactor under sentence, and particularly when they see him languishing in the tortures of a lingering death. But there was not the least trace of any such humane concern in the enemies of Christ. How must his generous soul have been affected with the rudeness, insolence, and cruelty, which appeared in so many thousands of spectators! Of this the Messiah had long before complained by the mouth of David in these words: "They stand staring and looking upon me:† they opened their mouth wide against me, and said, Aha! Aha!"‡ The evangelist adds; "They who passed by reviled him, wagging their heads." This gesture, among the Jews

* Jer. v. 3. † Psalms, xxii. 17. ‡ Psalms, xxxv. 21.

and other Eastern nations, was expressive of the utmost contempt. In the 2d Book of Kings it is said, "The virgin, the daughter of Sion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee;" * and it is remarkable, that it was foretold that Messiah would experience this kind of mockery: for he is represented in the Psalms as complaining thus: "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, and shake the head." † "I became also a reproach unto them; when they looked upon me, they shaked their heads." ‡ "The rulers of the people derided him;" which word in the original signifies, by turning up the nose, to express disdain or contempt. § The soldiers also, by way of mockery, came to him, and offered him vinegar or sour wine, instead of a cordial to support his spirits. That these insults were very painful to his soul, may be sufficiently inferred from the bitter complaints ascribed to the Messiah in the Book of Psalms, of the reproach of his enemies.—They derided

1. His truth and omnipotence, saying, "Ah, thou that destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross!" The preceding night, when Jesus stood before the Sanhedrim, the Jews had scandalously perverted these words by their false witnesses. Here they are again cast in his teeth. Their intention was to expose our Lord as a chimerical boaster; one who was not able to make good his pretensions. Thus the Eternal Truth submitted to pass for a liar, and the power of the Most High was accounted vain and impotent.

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* 2 Kings, xix. 21. † Psalms, xxii. 7. ‡ Psalms, cix. 35.

§ Εξεμυκτηριζον, *à μυκτης nasus.*

Further, They derided the honour of the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." 'If he be the Christ, the chosen of God, let him come down: for he said, I am the Son of God.' Satan had formerly began his temptation with this suggestion; "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down."* Here the instruments of Satan say, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Satan thus challenged the Son of God to come down from the cross, and attest the truth of his eternal Sonship by a miracle. That very action would however have proved him not to be the obedient Son of the Heavenly Father. For by coming down alive from the cross, he would have disobeyed his Father; who required from him obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

3. They ridiculed the miracles wrought by our Lord, by which he had sealed his doctrines, and relieved such multitudes. "He saved others: himself he cannot save." Thus they would render the truth of his former miracles suspected; arguing, that if his miracles proceeded from God, he would be able to help himself as well as others; and as it was plain he could not help himself, therefore his miracles did not proceed from God. Our Lord in the first year of his ministry had foretold, that he should be thus insulted: "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb: Physician, heal thyself."† This prophecy was here fulfilled by his enemies. Our Saviour, indeed, did not want power to help himself; but he forbore to exert that power, that he might help us; for he preferred our deliverance to his own.

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* Matt. iv. 6. † Luke, iv. 23.

4. Our blessed Lord's confidence in his heavenly Father was here ridiculed. "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him;* (i. e. if God have pleasure in him, and acknowledge him for his Son;) for he said, I am the Son of God." Christ, in his discourses, had often expressed a confidence in his Heavenly Father, and declared that he loved him,† that he sought and promoted his honour; that his Father did not leave him alone, but was with him, and assisted him. They therefore endeavour to overthrow our Saviour's confidence in his Father. Almost the very words used by these scoffers are found in the Psalms: "He trusted in God, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, if he delight in him."‡ Thus they again unknowingly fulfilled the scripture.

5. They ridiculed the kingly dignity of Christ. "Let Christ the king of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." "If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself." 'If thou intendest by thy military prowess to deliver the Jews from the dominion of the Romans, deliver thyself first, and thus give a proof of thy power.' As it was out of the power of the chief priests to erase the superscription, "this is the king of the Jews," (which was a great offence to them,) and as they could not prevail on Pilate even to alter it, they were incited to ridicule it, by saying, 'If he be the king of Israel, as he is styled in the superscription, let him come down from the cross and prove it.' To this they add, by way of derision, a promise that they would then believe on him. Yet if Christ had actually descended from the cross, these very

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* Εἰ θέλει αὐτον. † John, iii. 35.—viii. 16, 29, 50, 54.—xvi. 32.
‡ Psalms, xxii. 8.

persons would, in all probability, have imputed the miracle to sorcery.

Lastly, Our Lord's office of Messiah was ridiculed. The chief priests cried out, "Let him save himself, if he be the Christ or Messiah." One of the crucified malefactors also railed on him, saying, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." Thus whatever was venerable, great, and glorious, in the person of the Lord Jesus, was the subject of the most scurrilous reflections. His omnipotence, his eternal sonship, his divinity, his miracles, his confidence in his Father, his regal dignity, and his office of Messiah, were all exposed to ridicule. We shall conclude this consideration by deducing two remarks.

1. The opprobrious words, by which the blessed Jesus was insulted, are to be accounted amongst Satan's severe temptations.

When Satan at the beginning of our Saviour's ministry had been repulsed by our Lord, it is said, "he departed from him for a season."* Now, at the close of his life, he returns to the charge, and endeavours by these his instruments, to move our Lord to impatience, or excite in him a desire of giving a proof of his omnipotence, by coming down from the cross; by which means the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation would have been frustrated. But as the Son of God remained faithful in the first trial, which he underwent immediately after his baptism; so he showed the same firmness in this last encounter. The great Captain of our salvation submitted to these trials, that he might triumph over Satan, notwithstanding his utmost efforts; that he might bruise his head,

* Luke, iv. 13.

extract the sting of his temptations, and obtain for us strength to remain firm in all trials, and to come off more than conquerors.

2. As the Son of God nailed to the cross was assaulted by the revilings of his enemies, so when his members are, as it were, externally hanging upon the cross, when the waves of affliction are running over them, the tongues of their persecutors discharge their poisonous arrows. But great will be the reward of those, who in this particular are made like unto Christ, the first-born among many brethren. They must, after his example, keep silence, and amidst all the rage of the world, possess their souls in patience; and all will end in their eternal triumph.

PRAYER.

We thank thee, O Redeemer, who didst not only suffer thy body to be crucified, but wast also wounded and vexed in thy soul by the arrows of envenomed tongues, that thou mightest heal us in body and soul. Let this part of thy sufferings work in us a serious abhorrence of all derision and contumely; and grant that we may patiently suffer all the waves of abuse to pass over us, and in all sufferings may remain faithful, and willingly submit to be reproached with thee, that we may be made partakers of thy glory. Amen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIFTS CONFERRED BY OUR LORD JESUS WHILE HE HUNG UPON THE CROSS.

"*But the other malefactor answering, rebuked him [who "railed on Jesus] saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing "thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed "justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds; "but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said "unto Jesus, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into "thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say "unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and "his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and "Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his "mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, "he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! "Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And "from that hour this disciple took her unto his own "home.*"

THE blessed Jesus here distributes such noble gifts, as none of the rich and powerful can bestow. For,

1. On a believing and penitent sinner, he bestows the happiness of paradise.

2. To his disconsolate mother, he gives a faithful Son.

3. To John, his beloved disciple, he gives a tender affectionate mother.

I.

The crucified Jesus confers paradise on a penitent and believing sinner.

1. The person who obtained this gift was a robber

and murderer! It is probable that he had been born and educated in the Jewish church; for, if he had been a Gentile, he would have known nothing of the kingdom of the Messiah, or of paradise. But as the Jewish church was then extremely corrupt, and the country was infested with banditti, who gave themselves up to rapine and plunder, this man had probably belonged to one of these gangs. It is not altogether improbable that he might at some period of his life, have heard the discourses of our Lord; and though bad habits had for the present suppressed every good inclination, yet afterwards, amidst the leisure and reflections of his confinement in prison, the good instruction of his early youth might have worked upon his heart. For a grain of the divine word frequently falls on an uncultivated soil; so that it produces no fruit till after the lapse of many years, when sufferings and afflictions cause it to spring up.

As to this malefactor's state, while he hung on the cross, it was outwardly very wretched: but inwardly, his heart was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who was producing in him repentance and faith, and who employed him as an instrument to glorify the crucified Jesus, in the extremity of his sufferings and reproach. Of his repentance indeed, the evangelists give no express account; but it is sufficiently apparent from his reproof to his fellow-sufferer. For that shows,

1. An abhorrence of sin; which prompted him to check his companion in his abuse of the crucified Jesus. A holy zeal, and indignation against sin, is numbered by the apostle St. Paul among the effects of godly sorrow. *

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

2. It showed a devout fear of God. "Dost not thou fear God?" Had he still delighted in wickedness, the fear of God would not have been before his eyes.* But, having now a deep sense of the abomination of sin, his mind was impressed with the divine majesty, holiness, and justice. He was pained because his companion joined in reviling Christ, and showed so little fear of God, the Judge of all.

3. His discourse shows likewise a desire of reforming his neighbour, and reclaiming him from error. He thinks it strange that his abandoned companion could revile Jesus, when he himself was in the same condemnation, they both being sentenced by the civil power to suffer the same ignominious death. He thought it amazing and horrible, that a wretch who was nailed to the cross, and within a few hours of giving up the ghost, should sharpen his envenomed tongue against Jesus. He therefore rebukes his hardened companion, and would fain impress on his mind a sense of his danger. Now to endeavour to bring others into the right way, is a mark of penitence; as appears from the Psalmist, who says, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."†

4. Further; here appears a vindication of the divine justice: for he adds, "And we indeed justly." 'That we hang betwixt heaven and earth as a curse and abomination, is no injustice. Though the sentence is hard, and the death painful, it is no more than we by our crimes have deserved.' He vindicates not only the justice of the civil magistrate, who inflicted this punishment; but likewise the justice of God,

* Psalms, xxxvi. 1.; Rom. iii. 18. † Psalms, li. 13.

whose minister and avenger the ruler is, to execute wrath upon him that doth evil. * These words also contain,

5. An open confession of the crimes he had committed; "For we receive the due reward of our deeds." He does not particularly specify the several crimes which he had been guilty of, but speaks of them in general terms, yet without palliation; without complaining that there is no proportion betwixt his punishment and his crime, and without throwing any blame on others for seducing him: he owns himself a notorious criminal; pleads guilty; and confesses, that he well deserves the punishment, which he therefore bears with patience and resignation.

These were unexceptionable proofs of the genuineness of this man's repentance. His faith, which the Holy Ghost at the same time kindled in his heart, was manifested by the following signs.

1. By his vindicating our blessed Lord; for he not only reproves the blasphemies of his wicked fellow-sufferer, but gives a public testimony to the perfect innocence of Jesus, in these words, "This man hath done nothing amiss." Thus he looks on our Saviour as a holy and innocent person, separated from sinners.

2. By a confidential address to our blessed Saviour; "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Hitherto he had spoken to his wicked companion, and by reproving him, endeavoured to bring him to repentance. But now, full of faith and reverence, he addresses himself to Jesus, against whom innumerable tongues were discharging their rancour.

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* Rom. xiii. 4.

He desires a spiritual favour of the Lord Jesus, and recommends himself to his gracious attention. "Lord, remember me:" he does not pray for the deliverance of his body from the cross, but for the salvation of his soul.

3. He manifests his faith by an acknowledgment of the dignity and kingdom of Jesus Christ. Though Christ was in his lowest abasement, he not only calls him Lord, but ascribes to him a kingdom; and such a kingdom as he was to possess and enter upon after his death. He addresses one who had not even a garment to cover him, and who was dying on the cross, as a king who was to triumph and reign to all eternity. By this request, the penitent malefactor opposes those who were deriding the kingdom of Christ; and glorifies the blessed Jesus, at a time when his disciples were so silent and confounded, that they did not dare to acknowledge him to be the king of Israel. Could the thief have done this, unless his mouth had been opened by the Spirit, without which no man can say, that Jesus is the Lord?* This blessed Spirit enabled him to believe in his heart, and to confess with his mouth, the Lord Jesus.† He further manifests his faith,

4. By an humble resignation and poverty of spirit. He does not pray for any high station or post of honour in the kingdom of Christ; but only for the Lord's kind remembrance of him. He refers the rest to the love and wisdom of this spiritual king.—Thus he was a signal instance, how soon the Spirit of grace can accomplish its work, and bring it to maturity, in a soul that does not resist its sacred influence. Such

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* 1 Cor. xii. 3. † Rom. x. 9.

instances of conversion also occur in the Acts of the Apostles; particularly in the case of the Jailor, who the very night on which he was about to lay violent hands on himself, was, with his whole family, brought to believe on the Lord Jesus.

What this gift was, which Jesus conferred, we learn from the following words: "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The gift was nothing less than heaven, the desirable state to which the souls of the blessed, or the spirits of just men made perfect, after their separation from the body, are admitted in the presence of God. This humble sinner durst scarcely presume to pray, that the Lord Jesus would receive him into his kingdom; but the Son of God in answer to his request promises that on that very day, he should be with him in paradise. Our Lord, by this answer shows, that he was the second Adam, who now repaired the ruins caused by the transgression of the first; and opened again that paradise, which our first parent had shut against himself and all his unfortunate descendants. He at the same time forgives the criminal all his sins, by which he had deserved the punishment of hell, and he presents him to his Heavenly Father, as the first spoils which he had wrested on his cross, from the hands of the devil. And that this trembling sinner, who was snatched as a brand out of the fire, might be the better assured of the accomplishment of the promise made him, he gives him his royal word: "Verily I say unto thee:" confirming his promise with this affirmative.—The transaction exhibits,

1. The power of faith working by repentance. Faith kindled a new light in his understanding, and opened the eyes of his mind, so as to penetrate through

the clouds of reproach to the glory of Jesus Christ; enabling him to own Christ even in his lowest abasement, as the Almighty Prince of Life, and King of Glory, and, contrary to all outward appearance, to account his word true, and worthy of all acceptation. We see how it works in the penitent a hatred and abhorrence of sin, a desire after Christ; charity to his neighbour, and an humble resignation. It extends its government to the tongue; the sinner publicly acknowledges his own guilt, God's mercy, and the innocence of the Saviour. It must, however, be admitted, that in this converted malefactor something extraordinary was done; and that the spirit of faith in a short time completed, what in the ordinary course of things it performs slowly and gradually.

Ye who boast of your faith in Christ, compare your faith with that of the thief, which manifested itself by so many precious fruits of the spirit. How much cause will you find to be ashamed on the comparison! You have long heard the word, and have had a thousand opportunities which this poor malefactor had not; yet how far does he surpass you in the power of faith! How many of you are evidently, by your practices, still in unbelief. Your understanding is full of darkness, your will is swayed by the love of sin, is full of hatred to God, abhorrence to Christ, and a fear of his reproach; and you give up your tongues to the evil spirit, by uttering injurious and opprobrious words. Lift up your eyes to Christ Jesus, who is now no longer on the cross, but on his throne of glory; dealing out gifts, and imparting the spirit of faith to those who pray for it. Implore him to plant in your hearts this exalted and living power,

of which you here see a pattern; and which will bring forth the fruit of good works.

2. The transcendent love of Christ is here conspicuously displayed. Behold, how willing he is to receive the most wretched transgressors who sincerely turn to him. How readily does he hold out his hand to rescue the sinner from destruction! No sooner does this malefactor turn to the Prince of Life, than he is not only discharged from the sentence of eternal death, but declared an heir of paradise! Trembling sinner! Why dost thou hesitate a moment to give up thy heart to the Saviour, who has promised the felicities of paradise to those who truly turn to him? Dost thou doubt whether he will receive thee? Behold in the instance before us, his willingness to fulfil the desire of a wretched but penitent offender. Do not wilfully defer thy conversion to the last moment of thy life. Think not, because this malefactor did not turn to Christ till a few hours before his death, that thou mayest safely follow his example, and put off thy repentance till thou art laid on a dying bed. Remember, that this is the only instance in the whole scriptures of the acceptance of so late a repentance. How dangerous then would it be to ground thy hope on so extraordinary a case. Where repentance is deferred to the last, and in the meantime all the faithful admonitions of the Holy Spirit are rejected, God frequently withdraws his gracious influences, so that the heart becomes indisposed, or incapable to pray for divine assistance. No man can quicken his own soul; and repentance itself is the gift of God, and beyond the natural power of man. It might be, that this malefactor never had such an opportunity before; and now he no sooner sees the patience and resig-

nation, and hears the powerful prayer and affectionate words of Christ, than immediately instead of hardening his heart, as his companion did, he relents, acknowledges his guilt, and humbly seeks the favour of God. But with many of us it is quite otherwise. The Lord Jesus stands at the door of our hearts, and waits, but in vain, for admission.—Consider, that death frequently comes as a thief in the night, sudden and unexpected. The body is often full of pain, the soul overwhelmed with anguish, and the mental powers languid and confused, so as to render the man incapable of any regular action, or recollection of the errors of his past life. Therefore obey the present voice of God's word and Spirit; repent in this your day of grace, and use your precious time before it is elapsed.

3. The instance before us exhibits the kingly glory of Jesus Christ, which here beams forth amidst the deepest abasement and ignominy. Our crucified Saviour thus proved, that he not only has the keys of death and hell, with which he opens the caverns of eternal darkness for the despisers of his grace, but also the keys of paradise, and of the glorious mansions in his Father's house. Paradise is here promised to one malefactor, and shut against the other. Acquaint yourselves, therefore, with this Lord of paradise, who having overcome the sharpness of death, has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Be not ashamed of having fellowship with him in his abasement, that he may not be ashamed of having fellowship with you in his glory.

4. Hence also we may learn how to behave in our last moments. We must, after the example of this penitent malefactor, acknowledge our manifold sins,

and confess that by them we have deserved God's wrath, temporal death, and eternal condemnation; we must turn to Jesus Christ, whose blood cleanseth from sin; and appeal from justice to grace, from wrath to mercy. We must pray to our Saviour to look on us with a favourable eye, as he looked on this malefactor, and to remember us in his kingdom. We must patiently bear the pains which God is pleased to inflict on us; and in order to alleviate them, fix our thoughts on that paradise, which our dying Mediator has obtained for his faithful servants; and we must acknowledge our blessed Saviour to be the Lord of paradise, who has all power over life and death.

II.

Let us now consider the second gift, which Christ bestowed while he hung on the cross; this was a faithful son, to be the guardian and protector of his disconsolate mother. The blessed Jesus, now at the point of death, and suffering exquisite pain, is not unmindful of his mother; but expresses a tender regard for her; and "as he had loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end."* This affectionate parent had attended him to the place of execution, and there stood near the cross to which her beloved son was fastened. Then certainly was old Simeon's prophecy concerning her fulfilled. "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."† Every opprobrious, deriding, and abusive word, must have penetrated her maternal heart. But God supported her in these melancholy circumstances: she

* John, xiii. 1. † Luke, ii. 35.

possessed her soul in patience. She had probably been many years inured to the mystery of the cross, and both from the prophetic writings, and her son's own information, had learned that his sufferings should have a glorious issue. For it is said, "Mary kept all these things; and pondered them in her heart." With the mother of our Lord stood two other devout women, namely, her sister the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils;* for which extraordinary favour she showed her gratitude to her deliverer, and did not forsake him even at the cross. These feeble women, by thus approaching near the cross, put to shame our Saviour's disciples; none of whom now dared to show themselves, St. John alone excepted. It is the nature of love not to fear any danger, or to be separated from the beloved object by any distress.—Jesus, looking down from the cross, saw his mother, and St. John, the disciple whom he particularly loved, standing by her. Hereupon he said unto her, "Woman, behold thy son;" and thus gave his childless parent another son, to cherish, protect, and take care of her in her old age.

III.

Immediately after this follows a third gift, conferred by our Lord. He turns to his beloved disciple, and addresses him in these words: "Behold thy mother." By this expression Jesus not only enjoins his disciple to behave to her as if she was his own mother, and to perform all those duties, which an affectionate parent can expect from an obedient son; but he likewise

* Luke, viii. 2.

commits to St. John a precious jewel, the "blessed among women," who had found such favour with God as to be the mother of the promised Messiah. Thus our Saviour, in his last will, leaves to his beloved disciple what was dearest to him in this world. The disciple was far from looking on this as a chargeable incumbrance, but accounted it a singular honour. For we read, that, "From that hour the disciple took her unto his own home;" where he supplied every thing necessary for her support during the remainder of her life. She lived with this disciple, according to some commentators, till the sixty-third year of her age. By these words, Christ has confirmed the fifth commandment, and set to children a pattern of the tender care and affection, which they ought to show to their parents. Hence we learn,

1. How richly the blessed Virgin and St. John were rewarded for the fidelity which they showed to the suffering Jesus by attending him in his last moments. Nor was the attendance of the other devout women disregarded, for they had afterwards the honour of being the first witnesses and promulgators of his resurrection. * Thus will the Lord requite all those who are not ashamed of the fellowship of his sufferings. The world would, indeed, persuade men, that they incur great hazard by such a fellowship. But these are groundless suggestions. Supposing even that all human aid should fail, and persecution and distress should attend us; yet we may depend on his friendship, who is the Lord of heaven and earth, who has the keys of paradise, and is ever fulfilling what he has promised in these words: "Verily I say unto you,

* Mark, xvi. 1.

There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life." * Let us then courageously enlist among the followers of our crucified Saviour; for none of us will repent of having done so through the days of eternity.

2. Our blessed Lord has shown it to be his express will, that they who believe in his name, should be joined in the bands of love and unity. We are not to confine these words of Christ, as if they related only to his mother and beloved disciple; for the Lord has enjoined, that every believer should do to another all the kind offices which are in his power; and that Christians should show mutual love and benevolence. As he has loved us, and given himself up to death for us, he confirms the new commandment, that we should love one another; and by this testamentary injunction makes it irrevocable. How then can it be known that we are the disciples of Christ, unless we fulfil his law, by loving one another, and bearing each others burdens? This is a duty which we more particularly owe to the necessitous and the destitute, to strangers, widows, and orphans; and especially, to the poor members of the Lord Jesus. Though the mother of our Lord has been long since dead, yet many pious Christians still remain, of whom he hath said, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." †

* Mark, x. 29. † Matt. xii. 50.

Therefore when we take such persons in destitute and comfortless circumstances under our care, the sympathizing Jesus accepts of our kindness, not only as if it were done to his parent, but as a favour bestowed on himself; and will reward it accordingly. Let us then express our love to our crucified Saviour, by carefully observing this his last precept, and endeavour to alleviate and sweeten this troublesome life to our afflicted brethren, by labours of love, and the practice of reciprocal kind offices.

3. A cheerful and ready obedience to the commands of our Saviour, is the surest mark of the disciple whom Jesus loveth. St. John, in the instance before us, shows himself to be that disciple, by immediately fulfilling his master's last command with willingness. We do not read that he excused himself and pleaded his poverty; or that he represented the several avocations of his apostolic office; but, from that hour, instantly, he took the virgin mother to his own home. If therefore we would be the disciples of Christ, and such disciples as he loveth, and in whom his soul is well pleased, we must do his will from the heart, and execute his commands with a ready obedience; we must set aside the excuses of the flesh, and the evasions of unbelief; and must rejoice at an opportunity of showing our love to our blessed Saviour, and those who belong to his household.

4. Filial love ought to show itself in all obedience and fidelity to parents. In spiritual things, it must appear by praying for them, and caring for the welfare of their souls; and in temporal things, by promoting their advantage as far as possible; assisting them in sickness, poverty, and age. The honour due to parents consists in the sentiments of the heart, which should

be those of sincere reverence, and is manifested by respectful words and behaviour, and a ready obedience, without murmur, delay, or contradiction; by complying with their lawful commands, and submitting to their reproofs and corrections; by conforming to their advice, patiently bearing their foibles, and throwing a veil over their faults.

5. Our Saviour by his behaviour in his last moments, has exhibited an example for the imitation of dying Christians. They should possess their souls in patience; administer comfort to their afflicted parents, children, or friends; and edify them by an example of patience, piety, and devotion, under their sufferings. They should settle their worldly concerns with composure; should show the sincerity of their faith and love, by acts of charity; and endeavour to kindle in their families the flame of brotherly love and affection, and more closely unite their relatives in the bond of peace.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living Saviour! we thank thee who didst confer such invaluable gifts on the cross, by which thou hast manifested not only thy love, but likewise thy grace and power. Thou art now entered on the government over heaven and earth. Thou hast the keys of hell and death, and of the gates of heaven. Eternal life and every good gift are in thy hands. Draw us, we beseech thee, so powerfully to thee, that we may be partakers of thy manifold gifts. Thy imperishable riches are so far from being exhausted during the eighteen hundred years that have elapsed since thy crucifixion, that thou hast yet in store gifts for men, even for backsliders and enemies, and there

are still mansions enough in thy Father's house, into which thou wilt admit those who are not ashamed of thy sufferings. Bless, O Lord, that part of thy word which has been at present considered, that it may support us under all the troubles and afflictions, which we may meet with in following thee. Grant this for the sake of that love, with which thou hast loved thine own unto the end. Amen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS.

"*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the*
"*land until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened.*
"*And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice,*
"*Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani, that is to say, My God!*
"*My God! why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them*
"*that stood by, when they heard that, said, Behold this*
"*man calleth for Elias. After this, Jesus knowing that*
"*all things were now accomplished, that the scripture*
"*might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set*
"*a vessel full of vinegar. And one ran, and took a*
"*sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it upon*
"*hyssop, (or stuck it on a reed,) and held it to his mouth,*
"*and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us*
"*see whether Elias will come to save him, and take him*
"*down.*"

In this part of the evangelical history of the Passion, we have an account of the last sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Here we may remark the following particulars.

1. The darkness and desertion which oppressed his soul.

2. The mockery of the spectators, when he broke out into those remarkable words, which his agony extorted.

3. The painful thirst which he endured, and

4. The giving him vinegar to drink by way of derision.

I.

First, the darkness and desertion which oppressed his soul. The dreadful sufferings which God now inflicted on our blessed Saviour, were attended by a supernatural darkness. "From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" When a Christian here observes the account which the Holy Spirit has recorded, of this extreme inward suffering of Christ, he perceives how the providence of God over-ruled every circumstance of the sufferings of his Son. The evangelists observe, that this darkness lasted from the sixth to the ninth hour; or, according to our computation of time, it began about twelve at noon, and ended about three in the afternoon. The hours are not so punctually set down in the account of any of the transactions of our Saviour's life, as they are in the history of his sufferings. It might seem as if Jesus had been given up to the will of his enemies; but the case was quite otherwise. The providence of God had prescribed limits to their rage; so that they neither could lay hold of him before his hour was come, nor torment him longer than had been predetermined by God. The same providence set bounds to the prince of darkness, and limited the duration of his rage and fury against the blessed seed of the woman.

'O my God,' may an afflicted soul here say, 'my sufferings are not to be compared to those of my Saviour; yet I know, that even the hours of my sufferings are limited by thy providence, and that thou countest them to me. Thou appointest their beginning and end. Thou frequently orderest, that at noon-day my soul shall be involved in darkness; and that it shall sometimes lose the comfortable assurance of thy love, at a time when it shone brightest, and when my soul was full of light, and rejoiced in thy salvation. Grant that I may acquiesce with my whole heart in what thou art pleased to inflict, who orderest every thing for the good of thy creatures. Thou wilt not only limit the period of my sufferings; but wilt never suffer me to be tempted above what I am able to bear. Preserve me, O Lord, from the gloom of unbelief, from the darkness of spiritual blindness, and from the eternal night of the dark abyss. Grant that I may walk and work in the light while it is day, before the night come when no man can work.'

Justly is the soul astonished at seeing the Son of God, the effulgence of eternal glory, and the source of all light in the kingdom of nature and grace, hanging on the cross amidst the horrors of darkness. What can this mean, that the natural sun loses its brightness, and all the land is involved in thick night? This was no common eclipse of the sun; for that only happens at the new moon, (or when the moon is in a direct line between the sun and our earth;) whereas this darkness happened at the full moon.*

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* This extraordinary miracle was remarkably typified by that, which was wrought at the command of Joshua, during the conflict between the Israelites and Amorites. Joshua, x. 12. "On the day when

1. With regard to the Jewish people, this total darkness denoted, that by crucifying the Messiah, they had committed such a work of darkness, that the sun would not behold it; that God was in the highest manner provoked against the murderers of his Son, and would manifest his wrath from heaven on this wicked and perverse generation: that he would withdraw from them the light of his knowledge and grace, together with all joy and comfort, and leave them in the darkness of blindness and obduracy. The words of Isaiah were to be fulfilled in the Jewish nation: "If one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof." "And they shall look unto the earth, and behold trouble and dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness." * To this also the prophet Amos possibly alludes, when he joins the going down of the sun at noon, and darkening the earth at clear day, with the famine of the word of the Lord sent upon the land. † Thus this

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the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day;" even "till the people," under the conduct of Joshua, were "avenged of their enemies." So on that memorable day, on which the deliverance of a whole world was achieved by the second Joshua, "from the sixth hour there is darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." Nor does the sun "hasten" to give his light, till the dreadful conflict between Jesus and the powers of darkness is over; till he has "gotten himself the victory," and has "avenged his people of their enemies." For "at the ninth hour, Jesus said, it is finished." Surely then we may adopt the language of the inspired author of the Book of Joshua, and say, "There was no day like that, before it, or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man," even of the true Joshua, the Captain of our salvation; "for the Lord fought for Israel!"

* Isaiah, v. 30—viii. 22. † Amos, viii. 9.

extraordinary darkening of the sun, was a dismal presage of the spiritual darkness of that wretched nation to this very hour, which the Lord Jesus had predicted by saying unto them, "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you."*

2. With regard to our blessed Lord himself, this outward darkness was an emblem of the inward darkness, in which his soul was then involved. For as the light of the natural sun was then withdrawn, and darkness prevailed throughout nature, so the soul of our blessed Saviour experienced something of the terrors of eternal darkness; which now overwhelmed his conscience, from a sense of the imputation of the sins of the whole world.

O my Saviour, thus was it represented in thy glorious person, what a partition sin has made between God and mankind; how it obscured the light of God's countenance, and at last would have cast the soul into outer darkness. It was I, who deserved to be shut up in this dark prison, who had forsaken the Father of lights, and had loved darkness rather than light. But thou didst appear in my stead, O thou bright effulgence of everlasting light! and didst permit the terrors of eternal night to environ thee, and the powers of darkness to assault thee; that thou mightest overcome them, and thereby open to me the way to light and glory, and acquire for me a right to the inheritance of the saints in light. O fill me with hatred against the unfruitful works of darkness, that I may never have any fellowship with them, but rather reprove them. Grant that I may walk in the light, and have fellowship with thee. And if on account of an open

* John, xii. 35.

profession of Christianity, I should be deserted, and left to walk in darkness; or if the light of thy grace should be hidden from my soul; if the hope of my adoption, and of the remission of my sins should be extinguished, so as to make me cry out with the Psalmist, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, and in the deep;"* grant that according to thy example, I may, in silent patience, wait for the dawn of thy light.

When a pious soul further employs its thoughts on our Saviour's address to his Father, "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" it admires the filial disposition of the Lord Jesus; who, notwithstanding the agonies that surround him, addresses his Father with cordial love, and "with strong crying and tears,"† twice calls to him, 'My God!' As if he had said, 'Thou art still my Almighty God, who canst deliver my human nature from this extreme anguish. However severely thou dealest with me; though thou hidest thy face, yet will I never turn from thee. The eternal covenant for the redemption of mankind still remains fixed and unmoveable; and though all the floods of Belial beat against me, my confidence shall never be shaken.'

Moreover, our blessed Saviour asks, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" This was evidently done for our sake, in order to awaken us to reflection. God never forsakes any, but those who have first forsaken him.‡ Now the blessed Jesus had never forsaken his heavenly Father, but, on the contrary, had always done the things that pleased him.§ Consequently, the cause of this desertion is to be sought, not in him, but in us.

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* Psalms, lxxxiii. 6. † Heb. v. 7. ‡ 2 Chron. xii. 5. § John, viii. 29.

We indeed had forsaken our Creator, we had forfeited his precious favour, his inestimable affection, and parted with it as a thing of no worth, in order to satisfy a base passion. God may justly complain of us, "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters." We daily observe multitudes who, for worthless trifles, for a little money, some fleeting or sensual gratification, some empty honour, forsake the fountain of all blessings, and transfer their love and confidence to the creature. For the expiation of such heinous sins, for the reparation of the honour which the divine Majesty is thereby robbed of, the only begotten Son of the Father here laments, that he is forsaken of God. As Christ had taken our sins upon him; so was he forsaken by God, not only outwardly, by giving him up to his enemies,* but likewise inwardly; the powers of darkness and the agonies of death, being permitted to assault him. As, in quality of our Surety, he was to feel our pains, to bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows;† so was his soul to be deprived, for a while, of the brightness of God's countenance. He was to sustain all the floods of the divine wrath, which would have overwhelmed his human nature, had not the divinity within him supported it. Under this grievous depression of body and soul, God remained the strength and portion of his heart;‡ in his extreme mental agony, he adhered to the Almighty with undismayed confidence, wrestled with him during this darkness, and did not leave him till he had obtained for us the assurance of a blessing. As our gracious Saviour produced the merit of his innocence, and his perfect filial obedience, to fill up the separation between God and

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* Psalms, iii. 2. † Isaiah, liii. 4. ‡ Psalms, lxxiii. 26.

man; he has thereby opened to us a way to the friendship of God, and acquired for us a right to that fellowship with our Maker, which we had forfeited.

O my Saviour! I see in this mirror of wrath, the effects and consequences of sin. May I hence learn, how terrible a thing it is, in the sight of God, and what a dreadful separation it has made between God and man. May I highly value that fellowship with God, to which thou hast obtained for me a right; and that comfortable promise of thy Father; "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee." Stand by me, O blessed Redeemer, in the hour of desertion! Be with me in that gloomy path which thou hast sanctified, by being deserted of every comfort. Thou, as a merciful High Priest, canst have compassion on those who are deserted. If, with distressed Sion, I sometimes cry out, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me,"* yet assure thyself, O my soul, that thou shalt no longer be called forsaken and hated;† but that with St. Paul, thou shalt be enabled to say, "I am persecuted, yet not forsaken."‡ In such circumstances, may the meritorious sufferings of my Redeemer benefit me. May that affectionate exclamation, My God! My God! be a preservative against despondency; so that my heart even in darkness, may wait the dawn of heavenly light. And as, for my sake, Jesus descended so low, and was plunged so deep in misery, may I be willing to suffer the loss of every thing for his sake, that I may be found of him at the last in peace.

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* Isaiah, xlix. 14. † Isaiah, lx. 15. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 9.

II.

We come, in the next place, to consider the mockery of the spectators, on occasion of the words which the extreme anguish of the blessed Jesus extorted from him. "Some of them who stood there, said, He calleth for Elias." These scoffers must certainly have been Jews; since the heathens knew nothing of Elias. But the Jews, at that time, had many mistaken notions concerning that prophet; for they imagined that before the coming of the Messiah, he would be sent from heaven, and would again appear personally upon earth, and perform several remarkable actions. When they heard the crucified Jesus crying out in plaintive accents, Eli, Eli, though they well knew that in these words of the Psalmist,* he addressed himself to the mighty God of heaven, they immediately perverted his words; and converted Eli into Elias. Thus they scoffingly charge him with imploring the assistance of that prophet; nay, they pretend, that in his distress he departed from the living God, and placed his confidence in the creature. These impious scoffers had been for three hours successively, smitten with darkness; and had seen and felt the divine displeasure, in the extraordinary miracle, by which the light of the sun was extinguished; yet, no sooner were they recovered from their consternation, than they renew their former insolence, and make a mock of our blessed Saviour's cries. In like manner we see many, who have no sooner risen from a bed of sickness, or narrowly escaped with their lives from some imminent danger, than they immediately return to their sensual delights,

* Psalms, xxii. 1.

and profane or worldly pursuits. Be merciful, O my Saviour, to such unhappy men, and grant that thy judgments may make a deep and lasting impression on our souls. And, O my Redeemer, if I should be treated in some measure as thou wast on the cross; if I should experience mockery and derision, and my enemies should pervert my words, grant that I may think on thy patience and resignation under such sufferings. Give me also a tender and compassionate heart, that I may weep with those that weep, and sympathize with the distresses of others.

III.

In the third place, we are to consider the painful thirst which our Lord endured. How must the arrows of the Almighty have, as it were, drunk up our Saviour's blood! How must his soul have laboured, and his body, exhausted by the loss of so much blood, have been deprived of its strength, so that his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth!

Thanks be to thee, O blessed Jesus, who wast so earnest in the work of my redemption as to forget to eat or drink; labouring in that arduous task, till thou wast quite exhausted. By this thy painful thirst, thou hast atoned for my relinquishing the fountain of living waters. Thou hast by thy sufferings, opened the way into paradise, to the water of life which issues from the throne of God, and to the rivers of heavenly pleasures.—But did the Saviour, who was now taken up in accomplishing the arduous work of our redemption, feel no other thirst besides that of his body? Yes, certainly, his soul thirsted after the springs of God's comforts. It passionately longed to see his enlivening countenance, which had been hidden from

him. His soul also thirsted after our eternal salvation. Hast thou, O my Redeemer, thus desired my happiness? How desirous should I be, in return, of thy grace! Therefore, as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! * Kindle in me an ardent thirst after righteousness; and quench in me all thirst after the pleasures of the world, its honours and riches. Give me to drink of the water which thou freely givest to the thirsty; and at last lead me to those fountains of living waters where thy saints shall thirst no more. †

When a Christian farther considers, that the Lord Jesus publicly made known his thirst, that the scripture might be fulfilled, he admires the reverence which the eternal Word of God expressed for the written word. Jesus well knew, that this declaration of his thirst would draw on him a fresh insult; yet he was far from declining any additional suffering, that the scripture might be fulfilled, and that the truth of it might be confirmed by a new seal. O preserve me from undervaluing the word of the living God, or contemptuously using it as a dead letter! Grant that I may rather honour it as the voice of the supreme Majesty of heaven, and choose it for the rule of my faith and practice; and that I may be willing to suffer any thing, that the scripture may be fulfilled in me. ‡

IV.

We are last to consider the insult offered to our Lord, by giving him vinegar to drink. When the soldiers heard him complain of thirst, they filled a sponge with

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* Psalms, xlii. 1. † Rev. vii. 16. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

vinegar, (which was in a vessel at hand, as it was in that age the common beverage of the soldiers,) and put it on a reed, or, according to St. John, a stalk cut from a large hyssop-shrub, and held it to his parched lips, instead of a cordial to support his spirits. Our Saviour, by this circumstance of his passion, fulfilled the scripture, which he himself inspired, where this very circumstance was predicted of him; and he says by the mouth of the Psalmist, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."* He likewise confirmed his own words to his disciples: "I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine."† O my Redeemer, thanks be to thee for thine inconceivable love! Every thing which was transacted on the cross, was done for my good. Grant, that when thou thirstest in thy poor members, I may relieve and comfort them, to the best of my power. And if the world should give me a disagreeable potion in my distress, may it be sweetened by the memory of thy love and patience!

The Jews, who stood near the cross, still mocked the Lord Jesus. For while the soldiers were pressing the sponge filled with vinegar to his mouth, the Jews called out in derision, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him." According to St. Mark's account, the soldiers likewise joined in the mockery. The unbelieving Jews (as we have seen) intimated, that the Lord Jesus was a false prophet, who, since no one acknowledged him on the cross, expressed a desire that Elias would come and perform a miracle by taking him down, and declaring him the Messiah. Thus did all the waves of affliction, with combined impetuosity, pass over the Saviour in the

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* Psalms, lxix. 21. † Matt. xxvi. 29.

last moments of his life. So dear did it cost him to open to us the consolatory spring of life. Eternal thanks be to him for such transcendent love. May we readily determine to follow him in all things; and not think it strange that the world should embitter any cordial it offers us, and under the show of kind offices, should grieve our souls with mockeries and insults. May he preserve us in the hour of suffering, and grant that we may not turn our confidence from him to the creature, but trust to him to maintain our cause, and vindicate our innocence!

PRAYER.

Lord Jesus, bless to our souls this consideration of thy last sufferings; and grant that it may leave on us a holy and lasting impression. May our hours of meditation be so profitably spent, that we may feel the benefit of them in death, and praise thee for them in eternity. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of thy death and passion. Amen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST WORDS AND DEATH OF THE LORD JESUS.

"When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: "and he cried with a loud voice, Father, into thy hands "I commend my spirit; and having said this, he bowed "his head, and gave up the ghost."

THE sufferings of our Saviour were succeeded by the separation of his soul and body, by death. After

Jesus had received the vinegar, nothing further remained to be transacted or suffered on the cross. He had now drunk up the cup of sufferings; the law was fulfilled; sin was cancelled, the guilt of it atoned for, and the punishment endured.—We are now to consider the last words of the Lord Jesus.

O the joy of a faithful soul, at hearing his Saviour cry out, "It is finished!" Ever praised be thy name, O my God, that I have a complete Mediator, "who by offering one great sacrifice, hath perfected for ever all those that are sanctified."* Therefore, O thou Alpha and Omega, I will in faith embrace thee, the great author and finisher of my faith. Thou hast finished whatever appertained to my redemption; this thy meritorious work I will produce at thy tribunal, and with it cover the defects of my imperfect obedience. Grant, O my Saviour, that the work of grace may be also finished in me. Give me not only to will and believe, but likewise to do and accomplish what thou commandest, according to thy good pleasure; and grant that I may keep the faith, and at last obtain the crown of righteousness.

The evangelical history informs us, that he again cried with a loud voice, and said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

This last ejaculation or recommendatory prayer, with which our blessed Saviour concluded his life on the cross, contains,

1. A calm resignation of his soul into his Father's hands.

2. A joyful confidence and assurance of his subsequent exaltation.

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* Hebrews, x. 14.

1. The resignation of his soul into his Father's hands, is expressed in these words. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Our blessed Lord had said, "No man taketh my life from me; but I lay it down of myself." * He accordingly delivered it up into the hands of his Father; to whose care and protection he recommends his harassed spirit, which had laboured and conflicted for the salvation of mankind. As a jewel of inestimable worth, he deposits it in the hands of God, in the certain hope of receiving it again on the third day, re-united with his glorified body. In the 31st Psalm, from which these words are quoted, Messiah subjoins the motive which induced him to deliver up his soul into the faithful hands of his Father. This was the divine faithfulness. "Thou hast redeemed me," and hast promised to raise me from death and glorify me, "O Lord thou God of truth!" † Thou wilt infallibly fulfil thy promise; for it is said, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." ‡

2. In the recollection of the divine goodness, the soul of Christ, as it were, rejoices, just before its departure,

* John, x. 18. † Ver. 5. ‡ Isaiah, liii. 10.

assured that his Father would raise him again. Hence he says in another Psalm,* "Therefore my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced; my flesh also shall rest in hope: for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." All his agonies end in a calm resignation: he closes his life with an affectionate recommendation of his soul into his Father's hands, and a joyful assurance of a glorious resurrection. This is not the act of a malefactor, or blasphemer; this is dying like our true Redeemer, who is able to comfort others with the consolation wherewith he was comforted in his last hours; who knows by experience what it is to die; who presents to God the petitions of his dying brethren; who can have compassion on their agonies; who has prepared mansions for them in his Father's house, whither he sent before his own departed spirit; and has acquired for them an assurance, that through death they shall pass into life, and go to his Father, who will deliver them from pain and sorrow.

Thus has our blessed Saviour, in the last hours of his life, sanctified the death of believers; procured a hearing for their last prayers and broken sighs; and acquired for them every thing appertaining to a serene and joyful departure from this world to the heavenly mansions. Therefore, ye who have received grace to believe, make yourselves betimes acquainted with this mighty Conqueror of the fears of death, that when your change comes, you may, with the like resignation and trust in God, enter the valley of the shadow of death, and deliver up your souls into your heavenly Father's hands. As for you, who are still so unhappy

* Psalms, xvi. 9.

as to be strangers to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, be persuaded betimes to give yourselves up, body and soul, to his reasonable service, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* Behold, how willingly and cheerfully he endured the most painful death, that he might acquire for you the divine mercy, eternal life, and happiness. Therefore enter into his blessed fellowship; follow him as your leader in his God-like life, that, in your last hours, he may be your great consolation.

From the example given us by our blessed Lord, we may learn how a Christian should behave in his last moments.—Indeed for a wretched sinner, surprised in his career of vice, the example of the penitent malefactor would be more suitable, than that of our dying Saviour. Such an one standing on the brink of eternity, and having the sentence of death in his conscience, finds himself not prepared to die; his heart is entirely set upon this world, and yet he must immediately leave it, and pass into a state utterly unknown to him; the wrath of God abideth on him, and he is now to stand before his awful tribunal, and receive sentence. Such an one cannot better employ the last hours of his life, than in seeking reconciliation with his Creator. Let him take a retrospect of his life, and compare it with the unerring rule of the Word of God; and add to this, fervent prayer, that God would be pleased to open his eyes, and give him a true sight of his situation. In thus turning his thoughts on his past life, he will find that he has left undone those things which he ought to have done, and has committed innumerable sins in thought,

* Matt. xi. 29.

word, and deed, against God, his neighbour, and himself. His former life will now appear to him to have been the greatest madness, and the most brutal stupidity. He will acknowledge, that he has acted contrary to the rules and maxims of sound reason, by despising the felicity offered in the gospel; that he has suffered himself to be turned aside by the most wretched and trifling impediments, from the great duty of seeking reconciliation with God: that perhaps for the sake of petty worldly advantages, or sensual indulgences, which must for ever cease with death, he has forfeited the real and glorious possessions of a blessed eternity; or for the gratification of a momentary sinful lust, has precipitated himself into an abyss of misery. In his former behaviour he will observe abominable ingratitude to that God who gave him his being, and who from time to time has showered on him innumerable blessings; whilst he has set at nought God's worship, has not believed his promises, nor feared his menaces; and instead of making any grateful return of love, to such a gracious, bountiful, and benevolent Being, has shown himself a stubborn, abandoned rebel. Let him however implore God to work in him a salutary repentance and godly sorrow. This would induce him to detest his former conduct; and to be heartily sorry for his base and unworthy behaviour towards God. Let him look to the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and for his sake humbly implore forgiveness of all his sins. Let him, like the dying thief, confess that he deserves the weight of divine justice; and place his only confidence in the gracious promise of God, that he desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live. Thus must he persevere, hun-

gering and thirsting after mercy, lamenting and bewailing his sins, and praying for remission, till faith proves victorious over the accusations of conscience, and the terrors of hell and death; till he has obtained peace with God, through Jesus Christ; and some comfortable hope of the remission of his sins.

That a sinner who thus sincerely and hastily repents in his last hours, may be snatched as a brand out of the fire, is not to be doubted; but we must reflect how rare are such examples of late and effectual repentance! Many who have never experienced any thing of repentance and faith, but who made religion their jest during their lives, die with a lethargic and insensible conscience, undisturbed on account of their past lives. They depart with blinded eyes, and stoical unconcern, to eternal perdition. Many fall into the hands of false comforters, who mistake the natural emotions of grief or fear, or lively animal feelings, for the work of conversion; and thus they are soothed with false hopes of heaven. Many are so suddenly surprised by death, that they are removed from this world to the next, before they are aware. Therefore defer not your repentance to such uncertain precarious moments. How wise and happy is he, who betimes regulates the concerns of his soul, and sets his house in order; so that when he comes to die, he may have nothing to do, but, after the example of his Saviour, to recommend his soul into the hands of his heavenly Father! But to return.—When a person, who in the days of his health has been reconciled to his Creator, and been fruitful in the practice of good works, finds he is approaching his latter end, he will desire to employ in a Christian preparation for death those remaining hours, which God is pleased to favour

him with. A sincere conversion to God, is here supposed to have previously taken place, the genuineness of which has appeared by its fruits; yet if any doubts or fears should arise in the minds of such persons, they must endeavour to clear them up by careful self-examination. It will be proper to take a review of the ground of their hope, in order to know whether they have built their house on the sand, or on the immoveable rock. It will be proper to examine, whether they ever had such a sincere concern for the favour of God, that they were ready to forego all the advantages of this life in order to secure it. It will be proper to search and inquire, whether they had such a real hatred and abhorrence of evil, as not to comply with any sin willingly and deliberately; and even concerning the daily sins and weaknesses which cleave to the best of us, whether they humbled themselves before God, lamenting the want of fervency in their love to that Saviour, who was so worthy of all their affections. If they find in themselves these tokens, there is sufficient proof of the genuineness of their repentance and faith, though they may not be able to pronounce the day or hour of their conversion.

In this case, they have no reason to write bitter things against themselves, unless God should humble them on account of the recollection of some grievous offence, or of their having backslidden from the ways of God. Many Christians, however, undergo severe conflicts for sins, which they formerly looked on as trifles; and it behoves all, even the best, to see and lament the sins of their past lives, humbly acknowledging their secret faults, and seeking remission of

them in the blood of Christ.—They ought also, during their remaining hours, to be diligent in the exercise of prayer, of faith, of hope, and of self-dedication to God.

And, 1. In the exercise of prayer. Our blessed Saviour began and finished his last hours on the cross with prayer. His first words were, "Father forgive them;" and his last, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Prayer is the chief business of the dying Christian. He will easily find abundance of matter for prayer. With regard to what is past, he will implore forgiveness of all his numberless sins and infirmities. He will thank the Giver of every good gift, for all temporal and spiritual benefits; for all deliverances, encouragements, warnings, comforts, and salutary chastisements, that have produced the peaceable fruits of righteousness, which he is now going joyfully to reap in eternity. It will behove him to pray for those whom he has inconsiderately offended; that God would efface from their minds the impression of such offences; for those who had hated and persecuted him without a cause; that God would convert and forgive them: for those who have loved him, and showed him kindness; that God would reward them in time and eternity: and for his family and relations, whom he leaves behind in an evil and perverse world, among so many snares and seducements; that God would guide, comfort, bless, and support them. Lastly, he should pray for the whole church militant on earth; that its blessed Head may take it under his care and protection; defend, enlarge, and succour it.

If it be asked, May not a dying Christian supplicate God for the abatement of his bodily pains, for the recovery of his health, and the lengthening of his days;

that he may be a further benefit to his family, and better glorify his heavenly Father by a holy and useful life: to this I answer, he may indeed make such requests, provided it be with an entire resignation to the divine will: in this he has a pattern set him by his Saviour, who in his prayer on the Mount of Olives, said, "Not my will, but thine be done."—A preparation for death requires,

2. The exercise of faith. A believer may say: "It is against thee only that I have sinned, O thou that pardonest iniquity. Depart from me, Satan, thou accursed spirit, I know that I am the Lord's. O blessed Jesus, I am thy property; thou hast redeemed me from sin. What can these assaults of Satan mean? Why does he threaten me with the terrors of divine wrath at the tribunal of God? Come and assert the honour of thy meritorious passion: and since thou hast so dearly purchased me, I will rest assured that thou wilt not deliver me into the hands of an accursed enemy. I am thine; save me. Though the thunders of the law, of hell, and of death roar against me, I will not fear. In life I am thine, and shall continue under thy protection after death. To others, death may seem the king of terrors, but to me he wears, a milder aspect; for to thee I can commit my body, soul, and spirit. I leave this gloomy wilderness, to enter into those eternal mansions which are illuminated by the glory of God, and of which the Lamb is the light."*

Faith embraces every promise revealed in the gospel; but more particularly the promise of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and of the salvation of those who believe in his name. It may be of use to consider the

* Revelations, xxi. 22.

former mercies, guidances, and deliverances, which we have experienced in the course of our lives. A devout participation of the holy Sacrament, has also often been wonderfully efficacious in strengthening the faith of dying Christians.

3. To such a preparation for death, likewise, belongs the exercise of hope, of which our suffering Saviour left us a pattern. The hope of a dying Christian is chiefly directed to the blessedness of the future life promised in the gospel; and is grounded on the resurrection of Christ, by which we are born again to a lively hope of a heavenly inheritance. This hope shows itself, both in an ardent desire to depart and to be with Christ, and in a holy joy and composure of mind.

4. There must be an entire dedication of the soul to God; a calm resignation to our wise Creator, referring all circumstances relating to sickness, life, or death, to him; and particularly committing our souls into those faithful hands, into which the Son of God recommended himself.—This four-fold exercise of prayer, faith, hope, and resignation, constitutes the preparation of a pious Christian for death.

Consider, all ye who make it your employment to fulfil the lusts of your flesh; who make earthly things, wealth, honour, ease, and voluptuousness, your supreme felicity, and act as if you had a continuing city here, and were to live for ever; consider that you are preparing for a miserable death; and if you proceed in this course, your last moments, unless the grace of God should interpose to awaken your sleeping consciences, will be attended with terrible disquietude, and inexpressible agonies. How wretched will be your condition when, lifting up your eyes, you will see nothing before you

but horror, misery, and torture! If you look back to your former life, all is sin and impiety; if you look forward, behold an eternity of agonizing torments and despair! Above stands an incensed Judge; beneath, the abyss of hell is opened; you hear within you the clamours, and feels the stings of conscience, the witness and accuser of your most secret thoughts and actions. Do not flatter yourselves with a vain hope, or think that all may be remedied by a few broken sighs: think not that crying out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' is an atonement for a life of impiety. Repentance is too arduous, too important a work to be thus hurried over. When the body is struggling with the pains of death, and the conscience is terrified with the wrath of God, what strength can be left for such a conflict? Therefore, while you are in health, renounce the service of sin, and give up yourselves to him who has shed his precious blood on the cross, to give you a right to a blessed eternity. Settle your account with Heaven now in the days of your youth and strength, that nothing may remain to be done on your death bed, but to depart in peace.

As for you who have received the grace of God, be not remiss in your conflict against sin; be not negligent in perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Think not that you may finish the remainder of your work on a sick bed. You know not how many hours you will have for preparation; nor are you assured that your distemper will be of such a nature, as to leave you in full possession of your mental faculties till the last moment. Habituate yourselves in due season to the path of duty: so that if the Lord is pleased to grant you time, your last hour may be an hour of triumph; and that, if, on the other hand, you should

be suddenly surprised by death, your souls may be prepared to meet your God.

Timorous, but believing and upright souls, be not cast down under the apprehension of death, nor ask whence should joy come in a dying hour, after such long and severe conflicts? God can suddenly roll away the stone, remove the fear of death from your hearts, and comfort you with the hope of a glorious resurrection. Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, and obey his divine precepts; this will be the most effectual preparation for dying happily, and thus in the hour appointed for your departure, you may be able to say with joy, "It is finished! Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!"

Lastly, "When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he bowed his head and gave up the ghost." This cry, with which our Saviour gave up the ghost, probably proceeded from extreme pain and agony. Death, when it attacked him, was not divested of its sting, which the Mediator was severely to feel. The pains of death came on him, as pain on a woman in travail. He was to taste of death in all its bitterness, and by that means, to extract its sting and disarm it; so that it might be changed into a tranquil sleep to believers. Thanks be to thee, O my Saviour, who by death hast taken away the power of death, and hast divested him of his sting.* May thy last words be my light, when death shall oppress my soul with its horrors! Let thy loud cry speak for me, when my power of speech shall fail, and may I enjoy the fruit of thy victory; that the shout of thy host, when thou shalt come to judgment, instead of terror, may be to me a sound

* 1 Cor. xv. 55.

of joy and exultation; and death be swallowed up in victory.

PRAYER.

O faithful and ever-living Saviour, all praise be to thee, who hast sanctified our last hours by thine, and left us therein a glorious pattern for imitation. Grant to every one of us a wise and understanding heart, not to put off his preparation for death, till the last moments of his life; but in the days of health to give up his heart to thee, and by thy grace, to be transplanted from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light; so that he may know whither to flee for refuge when the terrors of death assault him. We pray for those who are already passed from death unto life, and in whom the foundation of a lively hope of a blessed eternity is laid, that thou wouldst daily quicken them with the consideration, that every day may be their last; so that they may always keep their loins girded, and their lamps burning. Graciously stand by them in their last conflict, that others may behold their joy and tranquillity, and be edified by their example. Grant this for the sake of thy name. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRODIGIES WHICH HAPPENED AT THE DEATH OF THE LORD JESUS.

" *And behold, the vail of the Temple was rent in twain*
" *from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake,*
" *and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and*
" *the bodies of many saints who slept, arose, and came*
" *out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into*
" *the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the*
" *centurion who stood over against him, and they that*
" *were with him, watching Jesus, saw that he so cried*
" *out, and the earthquake, and those things that were*
" *done; they feared greatly, and glorified God, saying,*
" *Certainly this was a righteous man; truly this was*
" *the Son of God. And all the people that came together*
" *to that sight, beholding the things which were done,*
" *smote on their breasts, and returned. And all his ac-*
" *quaintance, and the women that had followed him from*
" *Galilee, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary*
" *the mother of James the less, and the mother of Joses,*
" *and Salome, and the mother of Zebedee's children, who*
" *also, when he was in Galilee, followed him and minis-*
" *tered unto him; and many other women, who came up*
" *with him to Jerusalem, stood afar off, beholding these*
" *things.*"

In explaining these words we shall consider,

1. The miracles which followed our Saviour's death.
2. Their effect on the spectators.

I.

No sooner had the blessed Jesus bowed his head, and commended his soul into the hands of his Father,

than a most extraordinary scene of wonders opened to the unbelieving Jews, to certify that the person who was just departed, was he, whom Isaiah emphatically stiles *Wonderful.** As our blessed Saviour's birth was attended with a glorious apparition of the heavenly host, so at his death, the earth felt strange convulsions, unknown at the death of any other person. If we reflect a little on the causes and design of these wonders, we may learn;

1. That they were calculated to awaken the attention of thoughtless men; and to induce them to consider the death of this extraordinary person, and to inquire into the cause of it.

2. It was God's design, by these miracles, to retrieve the honour of his Son, which had been injured by an ignominious crucifixion, and to give a public testimony of his innocence. The Lord Jesus, when he was nailed to the cross, would give no proof of his miraculous power, nor deliver himself from death, as his enemies required; but referred the manifestation of his innocence to his Almighty Father. He had before said, "I seek not mine own glory; there is one that seeketh and judgeth."† Now this declaration of Christ was here verified. For when he had expired on the cross in ignominy and disgrace, the Father came forth and vindicated the honour of his Son, by commanding even the inanimate creation, in an extraordinary manner, to celebrate his obsequies. By these wonderful events, not only the innocence, but likewise the divine majesty and glory of Christ were eminently displayed. He had been sentenced to die for falsely pretending to be the Son of God. But

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* Isaiah, ix. 6. † John, viii. 50.

when we observe how signally God glorified him at his death, we cannot look on the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, as on that of a mere man. All nature showed, by an universal tremour, that the Lord of nature expired.

3. The prodigies were of such a nature as to have a particular signification, both to the unbelieving Jews, and also to believers in Christ. This will the more plainly appear, on considering each in their order.

The first was the rending the vail of the Temple; "And behold, (says the evangelist,) the vail of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." In the Temple were two vails, one of which hung before the door leading into the sanctuary, and the other before the door or opening into the Holy of Holies; and these were made of azure, purple, and scarlet silk-threads, curiously interwoven, and embroidered with flowers and cherubims. The latter of these vails only is here spoken of.* If one considers that, according to the testimony of the Jews, this vail was of strong texture, and was thirty ells in length, and four fingers thick; that is was a masterly piece of art lately woven, (a new vail being hung up in the Temple every year,) the hand of God must necessarily be acknowledged to have been concerned in the rending of it. What a terror must this sudden and unexpected rent have struck into the priests, who probably were per-

* This vail, which St. Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews, ix. 3. calls δευτερον καταπετασμα, in the second Temple supplied the place of the partition wall, which divided the Sanctuary from the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple, mentioned 1 Kings, vi. 16. In the second Temple there were two vails, which hung down from two large beams, one towards the Sanctuary, and the other towards the Holy of Holies.

forming the service in the sanctuary, since it was about the time for evening sacrifice! How must they have been terrified at the rending of the vail, and the exposure to the view of all the people, of the Holy of Holies, which they had hitherto carefully concealed from the eyes even of the priests; the high-priest alone being allowed to enter, and that only once a year, on the great day of atonement. If we inquire into the signification of this first prodigy, we shall find that,

1. With regard to the unbelieving Jews, it was an awful event. Hitherto God had dwelt in the Temple within the Holy of Holies, and there manifested his presence in a peculiar manner. Hence this place was accounted so sacred, that no mortal eye was to look into it. But now God having unveiled the Holy of Holies, and exposed it to the eyes of the people, it was intimated, that in just displeasure against the wickedness of his people, and of their priests, in putting the Lord of the Temple to death, he would from that time leave this his dwelling, and profane his sanctuary, by giving it up to unbelievers. * This afterwards was fulfilled, when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans; for the holy vessels were taken out of the Temple by the soldiers, and exhibited as a public show in the triumph of Titus.

2. But to the faithful, this rending of the vail is a joyful type of an entrance opened to them into the sanctuary not made with hands. When the vail of his flesh was rent at the separation of his soul and body by death, and the true High Priest had himself, with his own blood entered into the holy place, i. e.

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* Matt. xxiii. 38. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

into heaven, the way to the throne of grace was cleared of all obstacles, heaven laid open, and the covering which hung before the mysteries of the Levitical worship removed. * The church-militant on earth, which was prefigured by the sanctuary, and the church-triumphant in heaven, the antitype of the Holy of Holies, are now united with each other; the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, namely, the ceremonial law, together with the whole Levitical economy, is thrown down. "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." † A Christian, meditating on this incident, may say, 'I thank thee, O my Saviour, who for my good hast suffered the vail of thy flesh, which hung as it were before the divinity within thee, to be rent; so that through thee, my Mediator, I can now not only look into the heavenly sanctuary with the eye of faith; but likewise enter into it, and with confidence approach the throne of grace. O my Redeemer, I rejoice that in thee I have a merciful High Priest, who, with his own blood has entered into the Holy of Holies, and accomplished the work of eternal redemption. Stretch forth thy mighty hand, and from the top to the bottom, rend all the coverings of hypocrisy and wickedness which thou findest before my heart, and which would preclude thine entrance,

* Isaiah, xxv. 7. † Heb. x. 19.

And as a thick vail of prejudices still hangs before the eyes and hearts of that wretched nation which crucified thee, be pleased to rend this vail, that they may see in thee the accomplishment of all the types of their law, and behold thy glory with open face.'

The second prodigy, which happened at our Saviour's death, was a violent earthquake. 'The earth did quake,' or was moved. How far this violent shock extended cannot be determined with any precision.* It is however certain that it shook Mount Golgotha with the neighbouring parts, and the foundations of the city of Jerusalem. As the sun had before withdrawn its brightness, so now the earth trembles, on occasion of this most astonishing event. This earthquake not only manifested God's anger at the wickedness of the Jews, but intimated that both their religion and polity should experience violent concussions, should be removed, and abolished; as St. Paul observes in the Epistle to the Hebrews.† On the other hand, this earthquake may be an emblem of the blessed motions to be caused by the preaching of the crucified Jesus, in those hearts which had hitherto been hard and immovable; especially among the Gentiles.‡ As the mountains skipped, and the earth trembled before the Lord,§ at the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt; so this earthquake shows, that now the true redemption of mankind from the hands of their enemies is accomplished.—Should not we be ashamed, if our hearts remain unmoved at the consideration of our

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* 'The greatest earthquake,' says Pliny, 'in the memory of man, happened in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, when twelve cities of Asia were levelled in a single night.'

† Heb. xii. 26. ‡ Haggai, ii. 7. § Psalms, cxiv. 6.

Saviour's death, when the earth itself trembled and shook on account of it?—May this important event affect us with a holy trembling, and a salutary dread of the severity of divine justice, which here appeared so conspicuously. And let the consideration of this comfortable truth, that by the death of Christ we are reconciled to God, fill our hearts with emotions of grateful love! May we rejoice in the great salvation thus obtained for us, and at the glorious liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

It is added, "The rocks rent." The country about Jerusalem is very rocky. The rocks were so shaken by the earthquake, that masses of them fell into the valleys; others were rent with clefts and fissures. In the adjacent parts, to this very day, are seen wide chasms and fissures in the rocks; memorials of this prodigy. *

Another prodigy was "the opening of the graves." The sepulchres of the opulent Jews were generally hewn in rocks; so that when these were rent, many graves were opened. This however was a distinct miracle from the former. The divine omnipotence, which had displayed itself by rending the rocks, also wrought on particular places where certain saints were buried; and with this opening of the sepulchres another miracle was connected, which perhaps did not come to pass till the morning when our Saviour arose from the dead. For, by the power of Christ, "many bodies of saints who slept, arose; and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Who these saints were, whose graves were thus opened, is only a matter

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* See Maundrell's Travels from Aleppo to Jerusalem.

of probable conjecture. They are supposed to be, in general, such devout persons, as, in their life-time, had waited for the coming of Messiah, and had wished to see his day; and whose wishes were accomplished even after their death. This honour might be conferred, in the first place, on the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, the two last of whom had, at their death, left a particular charge, that their bones should not be buried in Egypt where they died, but in the land of Canaan;* on some of the prophets, † who had foretold the Messiah; and on some who were lately departed, as Simeon, Anna, Zechariah, and John the Baptist, who must have been known by those to whom they appeared. These graves were opened by the death of our Lord, as a proof of what he had before asserted, that "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice." ‡ St. Matthew says, that these saints came out of the graves, and made their appearance to many in Jerusalem, after our Saviour's resurrection. It is probable therefore, either that they were not restored to life till the morning when Christ rose from the dead, who was to be the first fruits of them that sleep, § and are to rise to life everlasting; or else, that though they were restored to life, in the instant when Christ expired on the cross, and arose when the graves were opened, yet it was not till after Christ rose from the dead, that they went into the holy city and appeared unto many, as witnesses of the resurrection.

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* Gen. xlvii. 29.—l. 24.

† Ignatius in Ep. ad Magnesios. Προφηται, μαθηται οντες, τω πνευματι ως διδασκαλον αυτον προσεδοκων, και δια τουτο, ον δικαιως ανεμειναν, παρων ηγειρεν αυτους εκ νεκρων.

‡ John, v. 28. § 1 Cor. xv. 20.

This miraculous opening of the graves was a reproach to the Jews, for having put Him to death, whose coming all the saints of their own nation had so ardently longed for. On the other hand, believers may be hereby convinced that Christ has put an end to the bondage of the Law, and brought the prisoners out of the pit;* that by his death, he has destroyed the power of death and hell;† and that one day, he will again open the graves of all departed saints, under the old and new covenant, and bring them forth alive, glorify them, and introduce them into the heavenly Jerusalem.

O my Saviour, the longer I abide by thy cross, the higher thoughts I entertain of thy sacred person. By the prodigies after thy death, I am convinced that thou art the real High Priest, who art entered with thy blood into the Holy of Holies; the Author of nature, which here sympathized with thee, the Prince of Life, and the Conqueror of death; that thou canst force his strong prison, dispossess him of his spoil, and rescue his captives. Therefore rouse me from my carnal security; call me forth from the grave of my sins; and give me a lively hope, that in the day of thine appearance, when thy voice shall sound through the mansions of the dead, and when all the spoils of death shall be torn from him, I also may come forth from my grave, and behold thy face in glory.

II.

We are, in the second place, to consider the effect which these miraculous events had on the beholders; among whom were,

1. The Roman Centurion, who commanded the party of soldiers at the crucifixion, and now stood opposite

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* Gal. iii. 23; Zach. ix. 11. † Heb. ii. 14.

the cross with his men, watching Jesus. This officer had taken particular notice that the death of Jesus was followed by some extraordinary convulsions of nature. The effect which the sight had on him, as the evangelists tell us, was,

1. "He feared greatly." His heart was inspired with a holy fear of God, whose omnipotent hand was so manifestly visible in these extraordinary phenomena. He began to reflect with horror on what he and his soldiers had been doing: that they had put to death a person who, even in death, had more power than the combined force of all the living, and whose last voice shook the foundations of the earth.

2. "He glorified God." He praised the God of Israel, and acknowledged that he does great things: that he can darken the sun, shake the earth, rend the rocks, and open the graves; things infinitely beyond the power of the heathen deities.

3. He acknowledged the crucified Jesus, to be a righteous man, and the Son of God. In this acknowledgment or confession of Christ, we may observe two degrees of illumination. In the first place, from the extraordinary circumstances attending our Saviour's death, he acknowledges his innocence. He declares that he was a righteous and good man, innocent of all those crimes which had been laid to his charge, and consequently, most undeservedly sentenced to death. But from this first step, the Spirit of God leads him still farther; for he also acknowledges the divine glory of Christ. He asserts that this righteous man was, in a particular manner, related to the Deity; and actually was what he professed to be, the Son of the Most High. Thus God confirms by this Pagan officer, the declaration which Christ had made before the Sanhedrim, and for which

he had been condemed as a blasphemer. As the lips of the Jewish priests, which were "to keep the knowledge of the Messiah,"* poured out blasphemies against Christ, God caused his glory to be proclaimed by the mouth of a Pagan soldier; a presage, that the same Saviour whom the unbelieving Jews had rejected, should be known and acknowledged by the Gentiles.

Secondly, The pagan soldiers who were under the command of this Centurion, and had mocked and insulted Christ in Pilate's hall of judgment, were among the spectators. The effect of these miracles was, that they also, were afraid and terrified; for St. Matthew says, "When the Centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly." Perhaps also the testimony of their commanding officer, and his example, made an impression on the soldiers.

Thirdly, There were Jews among the spectators. The greatest part of these stood about the cross out of curiosity, and some of them had joined in reviling Christ. St. Luke observes: "And all the people that came together to that sight," where God so unexpectedly glorified the abased and derided Jesus, "beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned."

1. They "smote their breasts." That action did not proceed from wonder and amazement; but expressed their concern, their grief, and repentance for what was done. They regretted that they had suffered themselves to be so far misled by their rulers, as to reject the Saviour; and to see him given up to injuries, indignities, and abuse. Then was fulfilled the saying of the blessed

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* Malachi, ii. 7.

Jesus, "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He!"* i. e. the Messiah who was promised to your fathers.

2. "They returned." By this expression may be meant, not only that they returned to Jerusalem, to their homes, to reflect farther on these things; but likewise in some measure from their evil ways, into the good way which Jesus had preached to them. They all, we may suppose, were not of the same temper and disposition. In some this was no more than a transitory fright and fleeting emotion, which soon vanished, without bringing forth any fruit. On others the impression was deeper, and consequently had a better effect. But it is remarkable, that we read not of the chief priests, Pharisees, or rulers, being in the least moved at these wonderful phenomena. We do not hear of their beating their breasts, and returning. These hardened hypocrites "regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of his hands."† To avoid the supposition that they had acted wrong, they would not own the God of Israel to be in the right; and even after the death of our blessed Saviour, exclaimed against him as a deceiver.

Fourthly, Among the spectators were also some of Christ's followers, of both sexes. St. Luke observes, "that all his acquaintance were there, and the women that followed him from Galilee." St. Matthew and St. Mark particularly specify Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less, and of Joses and Solome, and the mother of John and James, the sons of Zebedee. The last of these, with her sons, had declared, that she would also drink of the cup which Jesus was to drink

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* John, viii. 28. † Isaiah, v. 12.

of.* Therefore she had now been led by her love for him, to attend our Saviour in the last moments of his life, and by a sensible compassion she must have tasted something of the bitterness of his sufferings in his last agony. Of all these persons the evangelists observe, that "they stood afar off." Probably they could not with convenience come nearer, on account of the crowd; but in this distance those prophecies in the Psalms were likewise accomplished: "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off."† Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me."‡

No mention is made by the evangelists of the effect which these prodigies had on their minds. They had no occasion to beat their breasts, and to lament that they had injured the blessed Jesus. Their consciences witnessed better things to these devout women. Therefore, though the earth shook and trembled, yet they could lift up their heads with confidence. But it is very probable that a violent conflict between hope and despair, faith and unbelief, passed in their souls. They saw Jesus die, of whom they had hoped that he was to redeem Israel, and whom they had accompanied to Jerusalem with a persuasion, that the kingdom of God would immediately appear.§ At this instant the idea of the earthly kingdom of the Messiah must have been extinguished in their souls, and their hope of seeing it have vanished. But their faith might derive a powerful encouragement from the miracles, with which God honoured this catastrophe. Here all nature, as it were, cried aloud in behalf of the innocence of Jesus, which

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* Matt. xx. 22. † Psalms, xxxviii. 11. ‡ Psalms, lxxxviii. 8.

§ Luke, xix. 11.

had been oppressed by the false accusations of the Jewish Rulers. What an impression must it have made on them, to see the people beating their breasts, and to hear even the Roman officer and soldiers publicly owning the crucified person to be the Son of God! They might hence conclude that they had not followed Jesus, and ministered unto him with their substance, in vain; and that possibly the matter might have another issue than his enemies expected. They saw how suddenly the invidious joy of the Jewish rulers was interrupted by dreadful prodigies; and they concluded that God could still do greater things than these, and that they might yet hope in his goodness. We shall conclude with the following inferences.

1. A godly fear is usually the first effect of a serious consideration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Thus the spectators of our blessed Saviour's death beat their breasts for trouble and remorse; and when conscience accuses, it can be no otherwise with us. When a person reflects, that for his sins the Son of God suffered on the cross, what violent emotions must it not awaken in his heart! Such emotions will mortify pride and self-love. Hence we shall learn to humble ourselves before God, and stand in awe of his just displeasure. Thus the foundation of repentance is laid. But we are not to stop here, as it is to be feared, was the case of many of the spectators of our Saviour's passion. We must proceed farther; and dwell in contemplation on the affecting subject, till the heart is mollified and changed, so as to conceive a hatred and abhorrence of sin.

2. As God glorified his Son after his great abasement; so when his children have fought the good fight of faith, and endured sufferings, he will bring

them also to glory. Who would have conceived that our blessed Lord, while hanging on the cross, covered with shame and reproach, should have received such a tribute of praise, as soon as he expired, and that from a Pagan soldier! "Certainly this was a righteous man! Truly this was the Son of God!" Yet such was the issue. Thus, in the fight of affliction, we must continue true to the end. Such a conduct will make a happy impression on others; and even those, who during life, have hated, mocked, or persecuted us, will, at our death, bear witness that we have faithfully served our Lord and Saviour, and were his true disciples.

3. The death of Christ has not produced its true effect in us, till it has kindled the spiritual life in our souls. This life is indeed, properly one of the fruits of the resurrection of our Lord: hence St. Peter observes, "we are begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." * Yet the foundation of it is laid in Christ's triumphant death. Thus, in the instance before us, at the death of our Saviour, those good principles, which hitherto seemed dead in the hearts of the spectators, revived; and incited them to proclaim the innocence and glory of Jesus. The death of Christ should have this blessed effect in us, of imparting a new life to our souls, which will also manifest itself in the members of our bodies: so that they will no longer be instruments of unrighteousness, but be devoted to the service of him who died for us and rose again.

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* 1 Peter, i. 3.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, we praise thee, who didst even on thy cross begin to fulfil thy word, 'when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.' May it please thee, to draw to thyself those who are farthest from thee. Teach them to acknowledge, that thy death is the only means by which we can overcome death, and have the guilt of our sins blotted out. Incline all our hearts to contemplate thy meritorious death; and grant that we may, in due time, enjoy the precious fruits of it. Rend the veil of our prejudices, and shake our obdurate and refractory hearts. Grant that we may smite our breasts, and return from our evil ways. Have mercy upon us, O thou Lamb of God, and hear us for the sake of thy meritorious death and passion! Amen.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST INDIGNITY OFFERED TO THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS ON THE CROSS.

" *The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that*
" *the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the*
" *sabbath day, (for that sabbath was a high day,) besought*
" *Pilate that their legs might be broken, that they might*
" *be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the*
" *legs of the first, and of the other who was crucified with*
" *him: but when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was*
" *dead already, they brake not his legs. But one of the*
" *soldiers with a spear, pierced his side; and forthwith*
" *came thereout, blood and water. And he that saw it*
" *bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that*
" *he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things*
" *were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, a bone*
" *of him shall not be broken: and again, another scripture*
" *saith, they shall look on him whom they pierced.*"

In these words, St. John, who was an eye witness of the transaction, relates the last insult to the body of his Lord and Master, while it hung upon the cross.

Another indignity had been intended against the body of our Lord, namely the breaking of his legs. This we learn from the request to Pilate, that the legs of those who were crucified might be broken, and that their bodies might be taken away. This proposition was made by the Jews, by whom we are here to understand the rulers, chief priests, scribes, and elders.

As for the people, the miracles which attended the death of the Lord Jesus had affected them; but their rulers still continued obdurate and insensible. The earth had been shaken under their feet, and the rocks were rent; but their hearts were still unmoved, unbroken, and without the least apparent sign of sorrow, or awe of the Divine Majesty. This is indeed a melancholy circumstance. But let us withdraw our eyes from those miscreants, and look into our own hearts. How often has the death of Jesus Christ been represented to us! How often has our blessed Saviour been evidently set forth, crucified among us! But are our obdurate hearts softened by the representation? Is our evil disposition overcome? The prodigies which attended the death of Christ, have been illustrated and explained; but what is the effect and impression? Have our hearts trembled before God, on hearing that the earth shook at our Saviour's death? Have we been led to consider our ways, and seriously to resolve on forsaking our former course of injustice or covetousness, of uncleanness or intemperance, of pride or anger?

That we may better understand the nature of this request of the Jews, it is necessary to observe, that those malefactors who were crucified, often died a very lingering death; so that it was not uncommon for them to remain on the cross two or three days, till at last they perished by hunger, or were devoured by wild beasts. Here the Jews proposed the breaking of their legs, to hasten the death of the unhappy malefactors. As a motive for this proceeding, they represented to Pilate, that this was the day of preparation for one of their most solemn festivals; which would be profaned, if the bodies of the criminals should be suffered

to hang on the cross on that high day. How great was their hypocrisy! They would not profane the sabbath; and yet they had put to death the Lord of the sabbath,* and profaned the sanctuary of Israel! † They would not let the sun set whilst the bodies of the executed criminals were exposed, this being contrary to their law; ‡ yet they suffer the sun to go down upon their wrath against Jesus. This notorious instance of hypocrisy should awaken in us an abhorrence of that vice, which affects a zeal for the externals of religion, but makes no account of its essentials.—This indignity of mutilating the body of Jesus, which the Jews intended, was prevented by Providence. After Pilate had given orders that their request should be complied with, the soldiers first proceeded to break the legs of the two malefactors who were crucified with Jesus. The penitent fared outwardly no better than the impenitent thief. They both felt the cruel blows, and both expired in pangs and convulsions. To the soul of the penitent malefactor, our blessed Lord had promised paradise; but his body, which had been the instrument of his crimes, was to receive its deserts. He probably distinguished himself from his abandoned fellow-sufferer, by a resigned composure, and rejoiced in the persuasion, that however painful this hastening of his death was, it would forward his passage into paradise.

The soldiers having now dispatched the two malefactors, approached the cross of Christ, intending to put an end to his life also.—May *we* draw near to the Lord Jesus with a better intention, and come unto him for life and salvation!—But the soldiers, observing that

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* Luke, vi. 5. † Isaiah, viii. 14. ‡ Deut. xxi. 23.

Jesus was already dead, they did not break his legs. In this transaction, we must look to the hand of God, by which these soldiers were withheld from committing such an outrage on the body of Jesus. His legs were not to be broken, because though he was numbered among transgressors or malefactors, yet he was not one of them: because his sufferings and death did not proceed merely from the will and insolence of his enemies; but he had power voluntarily to lay down his life, before it was taken from him:* and thirdly, because the scripture was to be fulfilled, which, as cited by the evangelist, says, "A bone of him shall not be broken." These words refer to the type of the paschal lamb; concerning which it is said in scripture, "Thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house, neither shall ye break a bone thereof."† From this intimation of the Holy Spirit here quoted by St. John, it is plain that the chief view of that divine ordinance was to prefigure our Saviour's passion. We here observe,

1. That whoever judges of a man's spiritual state from outward appearances, will be frequently mistaken. The converted malefactor, as we have already observed, suffered the same painful cruelty as his companion; and yet there was an infinite difference between them. One was a friend of Christ; the other, an enemy and reviler: one was translated from the cross to paradise; the other was cast into hell. Thus two persons may be involved in the same misfortune, or under the same sentence, between whose spiritual circumstances there is a great disparity. One may be a faithful servant of God, the other the slave of Satan. The Lord knows

* John, x. 18. † Exod. xii. 46.

his own, who have departed from evil; and a day will come, when the difference between the righteous and unrighteous will be made manifest before assembled men and angels. In the mean time, it is our duty to show, by our calmness, patience, and resignation, that we are governed by a different spirit from the men of this world.

2. God by a timely death, often delivers his children from sufferings. By the early death of the Lord Jesus was prevented the cruelty of the soldiers, who designed to break his legs. God still frequently takes away the righteous from the evil to come, and removes them by an early death, before his judgments spread desolation over their country; or before the wicked can execute the impious schemes which they had planned against them. In whatever way the infinite wisdom of God may be pleased to dispose of us, we must rest satisfied with his dispensations. If the Lord of life and death is pleased by a sudden dissolution, to remove his servants, it is usually to deliver them from evil; if they are spared, and suffer calamity, they must rest assured, that not a hair shall fall from their heads without his knowledge and permission.

Instead of the intended insult of breaking the legs of Jesus, another indignity was offered to his sacred body. A soldier with a spear, pierced him in the breast or side. This was done either out of wantonness or insolence; or, the soldier might have an intention of trying, whether Jesus was really dead. He therefore pierced him with a spear near the heart, in order to dispatch him, in case life remained. That it was no small wound, but a large incision, appears from what our Lord said to the incredulous Thomas,

after his resurrection; "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." *

What followed this piercing of our Saviour's side is likewise related by St. John. "And forthwith came thereout blood and water." St. John, who stood by, could plainly distinguish both blood and water issuing from the wound; so that probably the pericardium was pierced.

Mention is made of the certainty of this remarkable incident, (which confirms the fact of our Lord's death,) in these words: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." The circumstance is related by one who had it not by hear-say, but saw it with his own eyes, and is also a credible witness, who was admitted by Christ among his apostles, that he might bear a true testimony of the actions and occurrences of his life, death, and resurrection. This record was also delivered deliberately, and with the assisting light of the Holy Spirit; therefore it is added, "and he knoweth that he saith true." St. John here likewise mentions the end, for which he bare record; "that ye might believe;" that ye might be assured by this event, that our Saviour did really die on the cross. This beloved disciple saw blood and water issue from his Lord's pierced side, which affecting sight must have made his own heart bleed within him; and as a faithful witness, he relates it to us, that we may also believe. Therefore "blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

Lastly, The evangelist mentions the counsel of God concerning this matter. "These things were done,

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* John, xx. 27.

that the scripture should be fulfilled. They (the Jews) will one day look on him whom (by the Roman soldier's spear) they pierced.* Hence it appears, that this incident had been predicted in scripture; and consequently that it did not happen fortuitously, and from the mere insolence of a licentious soldier, but that the counsel of God was concerned in its accomplishment. The principal view of Providence in ordering this event, and causing it to be foretold, seems to be, that the certainty of Christ's death might thereby be confirmed and ratified. Some may perhaps say, Is it of such very great importance for us to know that Jesus Christ really died on the cross? To which it may be answered, that if Christ be not really dead, the power of death is not really destroyed; since this was to be effected by the Mediator's death. If he did not die in reality, so neither is he risen in reality. And if his resurrection be merely a delusion, St. Paul's inference is, "that our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins."†

If it be asked, What was the purpose of God in ordering, that our blessed Saviour's side should discharge both blood and water? It is answered, that blood and water signify the two principal benefits which Christ has acquired for us. The blood represents the benefit of atonement, which is applied to us in justification. "For in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."‡ The water represents the benefits of sanctification and cleansing from sin, of which Christ has laid the foundation, by obtaining and pouring on his disciples the Holy Spirit, who is often represented in scripture

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* Zech. xii. 10. † 1 Cor. xv. 17. ‡ Col. i. 14.

under the figure of water, as softening, cleansing, and fertilizing the heart. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." * In order to enter into the consideration of this mystery, we must,

1. Take a view of the condition to which we were reduced by the fall. By the transgression of our first parents, we are involved both in the penal guilt of sin, and in its defilement. By reason of disobedience, we are obnoxious to the sentence of death which God passed on our first parents, and the punishment contained in this threatening, "Thou shalt surely die." We have likewise forfeited the glorious image of God, and our whole nature is defiled. In order to recover this divine similitude which we had lost, we must apply to another both to deliver us from guilt and punishment, and to repair that loss which we sustained by the fall. Now this has been done by the Son of God. He came in his mediatorial office with *Blood*, without which there can be no remission. † Therefore he shed his blood, and with it, at the same time, poured out his soul unto death; and by his death our debt is blotted out, God's justice is satisfied, and remission of sins is obtained. He also came with *Water*, i. e. with the Holy Ghost, by which the defilements of our nature are done away, its impurity

* Ezek. xxxvi. 25. † Heb. ix. 22.

effaced, good resolutions imparted, and the loss of the divine image restored. "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood." *

Secondly, We are likewise in this mystery to turn our thoughts to the design of the Levitical economy, in which these two benefits acquired by Christ are typified. There were particularly two things, expressive of the future benefits conferred in the new covenant;

1. Water, with which those who were under any bodily pollution were washed and cleansed from their legal impurities.

2. The blood of the animal slain as a sacrifice, which was profusely shed under the Mosaic dispensation. Both these means were used, sometimes separately; sometimes together. The water prefigured the purifying of the heart by the Spirit of Christ. The blood typified the atonement, and represented the power of the blood of Christ, the true sacrifice for the sins of the world. The priests by the Levitical law were, at their consecration, cleansed with water and blood. † But the real High-Priest of the new covenant, who is holy and without sin, did not, like the Levitical priests, make use of the blood of victims, and water from without; but he came with blood and water issuing from his own body; and thus, by himself, he purged our sins. ‡

This circumstance should likewise direct our thoughts to the two sacraments of the new covenant, which are manifest and powerful memorials of the two benefits procured for us by Jesus Christ; by which the death

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* 1 John, v. 6. † Levit. viii. 6, 22, 23. ‡ Heb. i. 2.; ix. 12.

and merits of our Saviour are appropriated to us. For the water which flowed out of his side, is set forth to us in the laver of baptism, in which, by water and the Holy Ghost, we are purified and renewed into the divine image; and by the symbol of wine in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is represented the blood which issued from his side, and which was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. * We shall conclude with one observation.

As our Saviour has opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness in his body on the cross, we should diligently apply to it in order to obtain eternal salvation. By this blood and water which flowed out of our Saviour's side, is obtained what the Levitical purifications and sprinklings with blood and water, typified indeed, but could not in reality perform. Let us then with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation. † Let us approach this free and open fountain, convinced of the dreadful guilt and pollution of sin, that we may find forgiveness of its guilt in the blood, and be washed from its pollution in the water. Let us attentively consider St. Paul's exhortation to the Hebrews: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled, (with the blood of atonement of the new covenant,) from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." ‡

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* Matt. xxvi. 28. † Isaiah, xii. 3. ‡ Heb. x. 19, 22.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, we praise thee for all the tokens of thy love, and for the indignities which thou wast pleased to endure for our sakes, both before and after thy death. Grant that we may hasten to the streams of blood and water which flowed out of thy side, and obtain remission of sins through a worthy participation of the two holy sacraments which continue a perpetual remembrance of thy great sacrifice. *

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* This seems the proper place for referring the reader to the Appendix, in which some of the remarkable Old Testament types of the sacrifice of Christ are considered.

When this work is used as a companion for the season of Lent, or for Passion week, (the concluding week of that season,) the two remaining Chapters of this part of the work should be reserved till Easter Even; for which their subject matter is applicable.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST HONOURS PAID TO THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS.

"And now, when the even was come, because it was the "preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, came "a rich man, named Joseph of Arimathea, a city of the "Jews; he was an honourable counsellor, and a good "man and a just: the same had not consented to the "counsel and deed of them; who also was a disciple of "Jesus, (but secretly for fear of the Jews) and waited "for the kingdom of God. He went in boldly unto Pilate, "and besought him that he might take away the body "of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already "dead; and calling unto him the Centurion, he asked "him whether he had been any while dead? And when he "knew it of the Centurion, he gave the body of Jesus "to Joseph; and commanded it to be delivered to him. "And Joseph bought fine linen. And there came also "Nicodemus, (who at the first came unto Jesus by night,) "and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a "hundred pounds weight. Then took they the body of "Jesus, and wrapped it in the clean linen, and wound "it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of "the Jews is to bury."

In these words are described the last honours paid to the breathless corpse of the Lord Jesus.

1. By taking it down from the cross.
2. By preparing it for an honourable interment.

I.

Concerning the taking down of our Lord's body from the cross, the evangelical history notices the time when it was done.

This is mentioned in general by St. John in these words; "after this," i. e. after Christ was in reality dead on the cross. St. Mark specifies more particularly "that it was in the evening," when the sun was near setting. It is further observed by the evangelist, that it was the evening of the preparation, or the day before the sabbath It was a vigil of a day which was to be kept holy on a double account; as it was Friday, the day before the sabbath; and as it ushered in the feast of the Passover, which fell on that sabbath: therefore it is termed the preparation for the Passover. The congregation were now performing their devotions in the Temple. But Joseph and Nicodemus were employed in paying the last honours to the corpse of our blessed Lord; and in this they acted agreeably to the words of Jesus, that mercy is better than sacrifice. The eve of this sabbath was a proper time for the interment of the Lord Jesus; since the Son of God now rested from his work of redemption. It might be considered partly as the conclusion of the sabbath instituted in the Old Testament; and partly as a preparation for the great sabbath of the New Testament, on which the people of God were to rest from the laborious service of the ceremonial law.

2. The persons whom divine Providence was pleased to employ on this occasion, had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah; who says, that the Messiah should, in his death, be with the rich.* But what little appearance was there of the accomplishment of this prophecy; since the principal persons of the Jewish nation not only rebelled against this

* Isaiah, liii. 9.

King, whom God had determined to set up in Sion; but even condemned him to die! Yet the wisdom of God provided the means to fulfil this prophecy. He raised up two persons to perform this office, of whom it was little thought that they would take on themselves the care of the body of a crucified person. Thus, when in any instance we have the divine promise before us, though we cannot see any one near us who is likely to perform it, yet we must not despair. The Lord will provide a proper instrument and will fulfil all his promises.

The principal person whom God employed on this occasion, was Joseph of Arimathea, who signalized his faith in honouring the corpse of the "despised and rejected of men, who was numbered with the transgressors."* He is described as a rich man, and a counsellor; one who filled an honourable post either in the Sanhedrim, or in the city council of Jerusalem. And thus was fulfilled what Isaiah had predicted. Joseph is also styled, "an honourable man," and St. Luke observes, that, among other good qualities, he had so far shown his attachment to justice and equity, as to act according to the dictates of his conscience, in not consenting to the counsel and deed of our Saviour's enemies. Hence it is evident, that he either did not make his appearance when the council assembled to condemn Jesus; or, if present, did not join in the vote for his condemnation. Some commentators indeed, suppose him to have been only a member of the city council; and not of the great council or Sanhedrim which condemned Christ. To a disapprobation of these unjust proceedings, he might be

* Isaiah, liii. 12.

led by his mere natural probity, and the impulses of conscience, which is naturally shocked at flagrant acts of injustice and cruelty. But St. Luke, in terming Joseph "a good man and a just," seems to allude to a distinction which was common among the Jews, who divided mankind into three classes, namely, just men, good men, and sinners.* The sinners were those who committed acts of fraud, injury, and violence. The just, were persons of probity, who were content with what they had, and abstained from molesting or injuring others. But none were styled good men, except those who were distinguished for active benevolence, and who communicated of their substance to the poor and necessitous. This last was Joseph's character. He was not only just, injuring no man; but was good, benevolent, and liberal. He was just, as he did not consent to our Saviour's death. He was a good and generous man; since he defrayed the charges of an honourable burial. But the evangelists have further recorded,

1. That "he was a disciple of Jesus," i. e. he accounted Jesus to be a teacher sent from God, and his doctrines to be true, and agreeable to the writings of Moses and the prophets. He was consequently, not only a hearer of our Lord, but an obedient and zealous observer of his doctrine; but privately, for fear of the Jews, and especially of his colleagues, who had passed a decree to excommunicate all who should acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah.† This fear of man was indeed a weakness and a failing; but as he had a well disposed mind, and a sincere love to the Saviour, God in this weak instrument, manifested his power. While

* Romans, v. 6, 7. † John, ix. 22; xii. 42.

the blessed Jesus was alive, and while he was esteemed, followed, and admired by multitudes, Joseph was a secret disciple, for fear of the Jews; whereas, now when our Saviour was dead, and his cause was desperate, Joseph's fear vanishes, and he publicly shows himself a zealous disciple of Him, whom the Jewish rulers had crucified. Thus, his faith ultimately gave him the victory, and overcame the fear of man.

2. "He waited for the kingdom of God." Thus his mind must have been free from the reigning prejudices of the Jews; for according to their notion, the kingdom of the Messiah was to be a worldly and temporal sovereignty. But Joseph waited for the kingdom of God, that spiritual kingdom which was to be founded by the Messiah. He was not offended at the sufferings and death of Christ, like those who were filled with chimerical notions of the conquests, pomp, and glory of the Messiah's earthly kingdom.

Lastly, He is described by the regard he showed to the Lord Jesus. "He went in boldly unto Pilate." His faith inspired him with courage: and though aware of the difficulties attending this affair, instead of being deterred by them, he resolved at all events, whatever judgment the public might pass on it, or whatever danger he might incur from the cruelty of our Saviour's enemies, not to be wanting in any endeavours for procuring the body of Jesus. And though it could not but be disagreeable to a man of his probity and conscience, to ask a favour of an unjust and profligate judge, yet he repaired to his hall of judgment, in which the chief priests and elders, from pharisaical hypocrisy would not set foot, and desired leave of Pilate to take down the body of Jesus from the cross,

in order to bury it; which could not be done without a licence from the Roman governor. Pilate knowing that crucified persons often lived two or three days on the cross, expressed surprise to hear that Jesus was already dead; but having sent for the Centurion who commanded the party of soldiers at the cross, and found it to be the fact, he granted Joseph's request.

Who does not see in this circumstance the hand of God; which so directed these incidents, that the Roman governor, by his inquiries, is made the instrument to confirm the certainty of our Saviour's death? Thus, as our blessed Lord, by reason of the enrolment and taxation, was entered in the register of the living under Augustus; so to strengthen our faith concerning the reality of Christ's death, he was registered in the list of the dead. Pilate gave Joseph the body of Jesus voluntarily, and without any present, which he might have expected from a man of his wealth. Upon this, "Joseph came and (with the help of his servants) took the body of Jesus" from the cross. With what joy would Joseph receive the permission from Pilate, and how happy would he think himself in being able to pay the last honours to the remains of a person, whom he honoured so much while living! Here let us observe,

1. When it so happens, that a part of public worship interferes with a necessary act of charity, and of love to Christ and his members, which will admit of no delay, the former may be omitted, and the latter performed with a safe conscience. Joseph had no reason to feel regret, because his care for the interment of the Lord Jesus prevented him from attending the service in the Temple, preparatory to the approaching sabbath. He was now to attend a labour

of love, which could not be deferred; and this was of higher value in the sight of God, than the numerous sacrifices at that time offered in the Temple. It would have been a hypocritical show of devotion, had he, out of fear of omitting the Temple service, been wanting in this opportunity of showing his love to Christ. Certainly, the public worship of God ought not to be omitted but on important occasions, and in cases of urgent necessity. At all other times we are to attend it, and by our devotion to set a good example to others. But if an occasion offers of being serviceable to a member of Christ; of attending on him in sickness, assisting him under temptations, or helping him in any pressing exigency; or if the providence of God point out to us an occasion where our charity is immediately required; public worship may, for that time, be omitted with a safe conscience. Such a high value does God place on the love of our neighbour, that he in this case postpones his own service, and gives the former the precedence.

2. External probity, and a love of justice, though not sufficient to make a true Christian, are essential parts of his character. Though the mere observance of justice and probity does not alone constitute a Christian, this truth is perverted by some sectaries and enthusiasts; who entertain an impious notion, that all external morality is exploded by the gospel, and that it forms no necessary part of the Christian religion to practise the social duties. But we here see, that the Holy Spirit gives this eulogium to the character of Joseph, "that he was a good man and a just," and consequently was possessed of every moral virtue. They that have believed in God must therefore be careful to maintain good works.

3. He who is faithful in small things, will be entrusted with greater. This gospel maxim we see confirmed in Joseph of Arimathea. This man was faithful in obeying the dictates of his conscience, by resisting injustice, and refusing to join in condemning an innocent person. He was faithful in the improvement of his knowledge of the truth of our Saviour's doctrine,* at a time when he did not dare publicly to own himself one of his disciples. How richly is he here rewarded for that fidelity which he showed in small things, and what a treasure of faith God bestows on him! For he publicly goes to Pilate, despises the world and its censures, and shows himself a true disciple of the blessed Jesus, when his cause was, to human appearance, desperate. If men would listen to the voice of conscience, God would lead them further, and, by his revealed word, would impart to them the principle of spiritual life. He does not leave the least work of faith unrewarded; but, out of his abundant grace, requites it with a plentiful measure of divine assistance. On the contrary, we must not think it strange, that he who disregards the moral sense of reason and conscience, should be left to himself. It is but a righteous judgment of God, that he who thus abuses the gifts of heaven, should be given up to a reprobate mind.

4. He that will not risque something for the love he bears to Christ, will never make any great proficiency in the school of Christianity. It is here said of Joseph,

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* It may even be inferred from the original text of St. Matthew; "εμαθητευσε τω Ιησου," that Joseph himself had made disciples to Jesus. The same verb is used in this sense in Matthew, xxviii. 19, and Acts, xiv. 21.

that he went in boldly unto Pilate, and desired the body of Jesus. Something must be risqued for religion, before we can attain to any degree of perfection: we must determine, for Christ's sake, to hazard our reputation in the world, and perhaps submit to mockery and insult from our former friends. The pious, prudent, and resolute undertakings of a true Christian, however hazardous, will by the Divine assistance be brought to a happy issue. What could seem more dangerous, and at the same time more uncertain as to its success, than this resolution of Joseph, to ask for our Saviour's body? Had he considered his own character, that of his colleagues, or the character and disposition of Pilate, a thousand apprehensions would have arisen in his mind, and deterred him from the attempt. But, as in forming this resolution, he regarded God only; by the power of his faith and love towards Jesus, he overcame all difficulties. This example should encourage us; and the happy issue of Joseph's enterprise, should animate us boldly to contend for the honour of God. And even if every thing turn contrary to our expectation, yet we shall be no losers by the attempt. We shall still have the testimony of a good conscience, and the honour of having risqued something for the sake of Christ; and in the day of retribution, our feeblest attempts shall not go unrewarded.

5. As the taking down the body of Jesus from the cross was not only permitted, but appointed and predicted by God, this circumstance should strengthen our faith. It was a part of the law of Moses,* that a man who had been hanged as a curse on a tree, should

* Deut. xxi. 22, 23.

be taken down and buried at sunset; to denote that justice was satisfied by the punishment and disgrace inflicted on the delinquent, so that the land might from that time be accounted clean. The great Surety of mankind had borne our sins in his body on the tree, and become a curse on it for us. * Now as his body was by God's appointment taken down from the cross, and honourably interred; we learn from hence that divine justice is satisfied by our Saviour's death, and the curse is abolished. Our Redeemer having paid all to the utmost farthing, God permitted him to be taken down, as a public testimony to all the world, that Divine justice was fully satisfied. Hence all who believe in this crucified Jesus, and obey his precepts, are exempt from the curse of the law, and free from condemnation. †—This comfort is of inestimable value to the truly penitent and humble Christian.

II.

After our Saviour's body was taken down from the cross, it was prepared for an honourable interment. The persons who performed this generous office were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Joseph with his servants had taken down the body. While this pious man was employed in preparing it for interment, the Providence of God sent him Nicodemus as a colleague, a person of equal distinction with himself. He not only bore his share in the expense, but likewise in the odium and contempt, and other inconveniences, which Joseph might naturally expect on account of this labour of love. It is here observed of Nicodemus, that he formerly came to Jesus by night for fear of

*Gal. iii. 13. † Rom. viii. 1.

the Jews. Hence it appears, that he was not free from the weakness which had possessed Joseph. But now, he also shows an equal boldness; and the fears of both are at an end.—Joseph brought fine linen in order to wrap up the body of Jesus; and Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pounds weight, and costly spices. The linen was steeped in this aromatic mixture or ointment; and the body of Jesus being washed, was wrapped and wound in the linen. This preparation of the body for interment had been prefigured before his death,* when Mary came before hand and anointed him for his burial.—The honour shown him was such, as only the most wealthy among the Jews of that age could afford. Thus was the end of our Lord's continuance in this world attended with more splendour than his first entrance into it. At his birth, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes; but he made his grave with the rich.

1. We may observe the gradual progress of the spiritual life in Nicodemus. He is first described as coming by night to Christ, to learn the first elements of our Saviour's doctrine.† He is afterwards described as a disciple, opposing his colleagues and saying, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"‡ And here, at the death of Christ, at a time when his cause was deserted, Nicodemus publicly owns himself his disciple, and comes to prepare his body for the burial.

2. No expenses are better bestowed than those employed on Christ and his members. Let the rich consider this, and encourage works of charity and benefi-

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* John, xii. 7. † John, iii. 2. ‡ John, vii. 50.

cence! This would bring down a real blessing on them; for what is bestowed on his poor brethren, Christ accepts as if it were bestowed on himself. The expenditure of Joseph and Nicodemus in magnificent houses and equipages, are buried in oblivion: but their charitable care in burying the Lord Jesus, is entered in God's book of remembrance, and will be rewarded in the sight of angels and men at the day of retribution. Let those rich persons, who would be thus happy, tread in their footsteps; and what they have hitherto superfluously lavished in vain ornaments or pleasures, let them bestow on Christ's poor brethren for their master's sake; so shall they be openly commended and rewarded by the Son of God, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his angels.

Lastly, The imperfections that often attend good works, are covered by love to the Lord Jesus, flowing from faith in him. It must be allowed, that there was a weakness attending the good offices of these worthy persons. This appears in their anointing the sacred body of the blessed Jesus, in order to preserve it from putrefaction; whereas it was written in the Psalms, concerning this Messiah, "Thou wilt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption."* But this weakness is entirely overlooked on account of that cordial love to the Lord Jesus, from which it proceeded. The Spirit of God, instead of pointing out this their mistake, has recorded the fact as the effect of their love and esteem for the deceased, and has passed over their weakness. Let us implore our faithful Saviour to shed abroad his love in our hearts,

* Psalms, xvi. 20.

and incite us to a laudable emulation, by the two noble examples of which we have now been treating.

PRAYER.

O faithful Saviour, we thank thee for that transcendent love to our souls, which gave thee to die for us. Give us hearts to love thee our crucified Saviour, and to rejoice at every opportunity of showing our love to thee, by relieving thy poor members. Grant this for the sake of thy love. Amen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BURIAL OF THE LORD JESUS.

"*Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a*
"*garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, which*
"*Joseph had caused to be hewn out of a rock, wherein*
"*never man before was laid. Here laid they Jesus,*
"*therefore, because it was the Jews preparation-day;*
"*for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. And they rolled*
"*a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.*
"*And the women also, who came with him from Galilee,*
"*followed after. Among these were Mary Magdalene,*
"*and Mary the mother of Joses, who sat over against*
"*the sepulchre, and beheld how, and where the body was*
"*laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and*
"*ointments, and rested the sabbath-day according to the*
"*commandment. Now the next day that followed the*
"*day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees*
"*came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember*
"*that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After*
"*three days, I will rise again. Command therefore,*

" that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day;
" lest his disciples come by night and steal him away,
" and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead;
" so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate
" said unto them, Ye have a watch; go your way,
" make it as sure as you can. So they went, and
" made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting
" a watch."

1. We have here an account of the sepulchre in which the body of our Lord was laid. Joseph of Arimathea had caused a sepulchre to be hewn out of a rock in his garden, which was near Mount Golgotha. Joseph never imagined that Jesus of Nazareth, whose disciple he was in secret, was to be laid in this sepulchre. It may be said of Joseph, as Jesus said unto Peter on another occasion, "What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." * Joseph's intent was to provide a place of burial for himself and his family; but God had a more important design in view, and so directed contingences, that Joseph here made a sepulchre for the Prince of Life. Joseph probably was put in mind of death by this tomb, and meditated on his mortality in this garden. Let us learn from him, to familiarize ourselves with reflections on our death and resurrection. Every fading flower may remind us of our mortality; and every blade of grass that dies in winter, and shoots forth again in spring, is, as it were a preacher of the resurrection.

2. It was a new sepulchre in which never any man was laid. This was provided for, lest the resurrection of Christ should be ascribed to a wrong cause. If it

* John, xiii. 7

had been otherwise, his enemies might have depreciated the miracle, by saying, "Possibly some holy prophet had been buried in that sepulchre many centuries ago, and when this Jesus of Nazareth was laid on his bones, he was restored to life, as we have a similar instance in scripture.*

3. We are further informed, that this sepulchre was hewn in a rock. This circumstance no doubt was likewise of divine appointment. For had it been on a loose soil, unbelievers might have pretended, that the disciples of Jesus had made a subterraneous passage, and carried off the body, without breaking the seal, by which the outside was secured. But the wise Providence of God, by this circumstance obviated all such cavils against the certainty of our Saviour's resurrection.

Lastly, The reason is mentioned why this sepulchre was chosen in preference to any other, in these words: "Here laid they Jesus, therefore, because of the Jews preparation-day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand." These pious persons, who took care of our Saviour's burial, had but little time left. It was within an hour or two of sun-set, when the Jewish sabbath began. As time did not permit them to carry the body of Jesus to any place at a distance from Golgotha, there was a necessity of making choice of the nearest sepulchre. This circumstance likewise was so ordered, that the place where Jesus Christ suffered the greatest ignominy, should be contiguous to that which was the first theatre of his glory.

The interment of our blessed Lord is briefly related by the evangelists. "There laid they Jesus." Among

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* 2 Kings, xiii. 21.

the Jews, every family of distinction had a vault, consisting of long narrow cavities cut in a rock. In one of these niches, the corpse, wrapped or wound in linen grave-clothes, was put. In this manner the body of the Lord Jesus was laid in one of the recesses of Joseph's new sepulchre. According to the custom of the Jews, he would, as a crucified person, have been thrown into a pit, among the bodies of malefactors. But an honourable burial took place between his state of abasement, and that of his exaltation; and it was, as it were, the dawn of his approaching glory.

Let us next take a view of the different behaviour of the friends and enemies of our blessed Lord on this occasion.

First, Let us consider the behaviour of his friends. These were,

1. Joseph and Nicodemus; of whom it is said, That after anointing Jesus, wrapping his body in fine linen, and laying it in the cavity of a rock, they rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. They securely shut up the body in the sepulchre, without entertaining any hopes that he would rise again, or come out of it alive.

2. Among our Saviour's friends were also several devout women, some of whom had followed him from Galilee. They had been witnesses of the death of our Lord, and stood over against his cross when he gave up the ghost; and are here witnesses of his burial. These women, "sat over against the sepulchre, and beheld where and how his body was laid:" and were the more careful in observing the place, that they might find it again. It affords us a further testimony of the reality of our Saviour's death, that these his zealous friends were so near at the time of his burial:

for they never would have permitted him to be interred, had there been the least signs of remaining life. St. Luke further observes, "that they returned, and prepared spices and ointments." They went into the city, and bought some precious aromatics, before it was night, and consequently before the sabbath began, in order to anoint the body of Jesus after that day should be past. These devout women were far from entertaining any thoughts of our Lord's resurrection: their design was only to show their respect to the body of a person whom they had so highly valued, and to preserve it as long as possible from corruption. Lastly, the evangelist says, that "they rested on the sabbath day, according to the commandment." They punctually observed the law of God, and would not by any means violate it; though their love for their Saviour, struggling against their fear of transgressing the law, must have powerfully urged them, and have drawn their thoughts to the sepulchre. We are to consider,

Secondly, The behaviour of our Lord's enemies on this occasion. These were,

1. The chief priests and pharisees; who did not let their hatred against the Lord Jesus rest even on the sabbath-day, though the devout women, mentioned above, showed their respect to the commandment. His enemies went early in the morning of the sabbath to Pilate, instead of attending to the duties of the day; and addressed him thus: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days, I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre may be made sure, until the third day; lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so

the last error shall be worse than the first." Thus they are anxious that a seal might be put on the tomb of Jesus, and a party of soldiers appointed to watch it; alledging our Saviour's prophecy of his resurrection; which they remembered better than his own disciples had done. Yet they could not repeat this prophecy without an invective against Jesus; calling him a deceiver. This circumstance of their extreme caution, even after death, concerning him whom they declaimed against as a deceiver and false prophet, shows that they had some apprehensions of the divine mission of Jesus, though this testimony of their conscience was suppressed. The innocent disciples were charged with the intention of a fraudulent removal of the body. They had been hitherto accounted a simple and timorous set of men; but now, such stratagems are apprehended from them, as required address, courage, and resolution. The Jews further alledged, that "the last error would be worse than the first." That is, the report of Jesus being risen on the third day, would have a worse effect on the people, than his preaching while alive. Thus, these hypocrites opposed the decree of God concerning the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, in order to justify their wicked proceedings in the eyes of the world.

We are next informed of the conduct of Pilate, the Roman governor, with whom the rulers of the Jews "took counsel against the Lord, and against his Anointed."* As he had before been prevailed on by these rulers to order the crucifixion of Jesus; so now he is now further solicited by them to endeavour to prevent his resurrection. It was not indeed for the

* Psalms, ii. 2; Acts, iv. 25.

interest of Pilate that he should be charged with the crucifixion of an innocent and holy man, who afterwards rose again from the dead. Therefore he very willingly consents that a party of Roman soldiers should watch and secure the sepulchre, as the Jews might direct. The chief priests gladly received this permission; and now thought themselves sure of preventing the resurrection of Jesus, or even the pretence of it by his followers.

But all these contrivances of our Lord's enemies serve only to confirm the truth of his resurrection, which his heavenly Father had long before decreed. To make his triumph more illustrious, God so directed all contingencies, that the enemies of Christ should receive advice of his resurrection from their own watch; who with ghastly countenances and trembling limbs came and acquainted them, that Jesus, without any aid, had broken open the sepulchre, and come forth alive.

In order to reap real benefit from the consideration of our Lord's burial, we must reflect on the character and quality in which he died on the cross, before he descended into the sepulchre, and on the lessons which are to be learned from this circumstance in the history of his passion.

1. He hung on the cross as the Lamb of God, bearing both the burden of our guilt, and the load of our punishment and curse; so that by undergoing this painful, ignominious death, he might atone for our sins, and satisfy the divine justice. As he was taken down from the cross and deposited in the sepulchre, we have here a certain proof that he has suffered all the punishment which he deserved as our surety; that he has discharged our immense debt, abolished

the curse of the law, and, by the shedding of his precious blood, satisfied divine justice. It is a public declaration, that justice had no further demands on his person, and that the sum of the debt of all mankind was completely discharged. This is a comfort not to be purchased by all the riches of this world; and it can be appropriated only by repentance and faith, and by our dying to sin and being alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *

2. While an Israelite was hanging as a curse on a tree, the community of which he was a member, and and the land in which he lived, was accounted unclean. † Jesus bore our curse on the cross; but, in the evening, he was taken down from it, according to the injunction of the divine law; which was a token that the curse was removed, and the land was again clean. Now he, who by faith enters into fellowship with Christ, becomes a partaker of his death and burial, and all the precious fruits accruing from both. He is consequently looked upon by God, as discharged from the demands of the law, and entirely freed from the curse. Know therefore, ye penitent believers who are in this happy state, that you are clean in the sight of God, and that there is no longer any condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. ‡ Your heavenly Father is reconciled to you by the sufferings of Christ; and satisfaction having been made to his justice by your Surety, he has discharged you from all further claims. Only approach the throne of grace, repent of your sins, believe in Christ, and obey his precepts; and, instead of a curse, ye shall inherit a blessing.

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* Rom. vi. 9. † Deut. xxi. 22, 23. ‡ Rom. viii. 1.

3. The burial of Christ tends to the confirmation of our faith. For, from this it is evident, that he really died, and that there was no collusion in the manner of his death; and further, that his subsequent resurrection, a fact on which all our hopes depend, must have been real.—Christ having encountered death, overcame, and swallowed it up in victory. The Prince of Life extracted its venomous sting. He not only triumphed over it by the cross, in his death; but pursued it even into the grave, its residence and strong-hold, and there, as it were, for the last time, bruised the serpent's head.

4. The burial of Christ had been predicted and prefigured. When it is said in the Psalms, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (or in the state of departed souls) neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption;" * it is presupposed that the Messiah was to be laid in the grave, the usual place of corruption. Isaiah says, "that the Messiah made his grave with the rich in his death," † a clear prophecy of the burial of Christ: which is also further typified in the Old Testament by the prophet Jonah. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." ‡ In other passages also, our Lord had foretold his burial. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." § O the transcendent love of Christ, who, by dying, hath begotten us again to a glorious and immortal life.

5. The burial of Christ is to be considered as a seal

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* Psalms, xvi. 10. † Isaiah, liii. 9. ‡ Matt. xii. 40.
§ John, xii. 24.

of his innocence. Both are connected together; hence the prophet says, "He was with the rich in his death, (i. e. he was laid in the sepulchre of a rich man,) because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." *

6. By virtue of our Saviour's burial, the graves of believers are sanctified and changed into a calm and peaceful repose. What disciple of Christ need now dread the grave; since, through his Saviour, it is made the passage to the regions of eternal day? From Christ's burial, he derives comfort. St. Paul says, "If one died for all, then were all dead." † As the first man in his fall, represented the whole race of mankind; so, in the work of redemption, the second Adam in his crucifixion, death, and burial, was likewise the representative of mankind. Therefore it is said in scripture, of believers who enter into the fellowship of the blessed Jesus, "That they are circumcised with Christ, crucified with Christ, dead with Christ." ‡ To this fellowship with Christ's burial we are brought by baptism, "We are buried with him in baptism." § For as anciently the whole body was immersed in the water of baptism, ‖ and thus as it were buried for some moments, from the sight of the spectators; this temporary continuance under the water, signified that baptized persons are buried with Christ, and consequently are entitled to all the benefits which he purchased by his death and burial. From this intimate union with the buried Jesus, a baptized person

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* Isaiah, liii. 9. † 2 Cor. v. 14.

‡ Rom. vi. 4, 8.; Col. ii. 11. § Col. ii. 12.

‖ This is the form prescribed by the Church of England.—*See the Rubrick.*

is accounted as really dead unto sin; so that neither sin nor the curse attending it, neither the world nor the devil, dare triumph over him any longer. And as our Saviour's burial was followed by his resurrection; so we who are buried with Christ, must also rise again with him from the grave of sin, and walk in newness of life.

Let us praise our faithful Saviour, who already in our infancy has received us into the fellowship of his burial, when we could only lament our misery with tears, and had not words to express our wants, or to implore his benefits. Let us examine whether we are dead unto sin, buried with Christ, and made alive to God. The old man must be for ever put off, and the sins which Christ buried in his grave, are never more to be brought to light. If we have already done this, let us still with godly sorrow, enter into the fellowship of Christ's death and burial. Let us "mortify our members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness;" in a word, let us "put off the old man with his deeds." * Let us, as those who are dead to the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, adhere to the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his cross. Let us be willing to be hid with Christ in God; so "that when Christ, who is our life shall appear, we may also appear with him in glory." † To this end, may God, for the sake of his beloved Son, bless to us this and all the preceding considerations; that they may bring forth in us the fruits of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

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* Coloss. iii. 5, 9. † Coloss. iii. 3, 5.

PRAYER.

O blessed Jesus, who didst submit to the cross, and descend into the mansions of the dead for our sake, praised be thy name for these proofs of thy love. O make us the happy partakers of all the fruits of thy meritorious sufferings, thy death, and thy burial! Ever praised be thy name for the grace which we trust thou hast bestowed upon us in the considerations of thy sufferings, from thy internal agony in the garden, to thy descent into the chambers of the grave. Set thy seal to all the good thoughts which these considerations have stirred in our hearts. May we in life and death, in the hours of suffering and of joy, derive from this view of thy passion, health, strength, comfort, and blessing; and through the grave and gate of thy death, may we pass to a joyful resurrection with thee, who now livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

APPENDIX.

CHAPTER I.

THE WATER WHICH FLOWED FROM THE ROCK, A TYPE OF THE WATER WHICH ISSUED FROM OUR SAVIOUR'S SIDE.

"*And the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed*
"*from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, accord-*
"*ing to the commandments of the Lord, and pitched in*
"*Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to*
"*drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and*
"*said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses*
"*said unto them, Why chide you with me? Wherefore do*
"*ye tempt the Lord? And the people thirsted there for*
"*water, and the people murmured against Moses, and*
"*said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us out*
"*of Egypt, to kill us, and our children, and our cattle*
"*with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying,*
"*What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready*
"*to stone me. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on*
"*before the people, and take with thee the elders of Israel:*
"*and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in*
"*thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee*
"*there, upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the*
"*rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people*
"*may drink. And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders*
"*of Israel.*" Exodus, xvii. 1.

In these words we have an account of a surprising miracle which God wrought in the deserts of Arabia.

The occasion of this wonderful display of the divine power, was the want of water. Though the children of Israel had plenty of flesh and bread, to satisfy their hunger, the quails lying in heaps about their tents, and the manna falling every night on the earth; yet they were in extreme want of water. Thus God, in his wisdom seldom gives men at once every thing they wish for; but permits them to feel the want of something, in order to keep them in continual discipline, and oblige them to look up to his all-dispensing hand. But in this exigency, the Israelites returned to their impious mistrust of divine Providence, even so as to break out into menacing complaints against Moses. Their distress discovered the evil concealed in their hearts. At the waters of Marah, which were miraculously sweetened for their use, and at the twelve wells of Elim, they showed no distrust, or want of faith. But no sooner were they again in want of water, than their unbelief manifested itself in wicked murmurs. Thus it is, to this very day. When God deprives men of their earthly comforts, they are put to the test whether they believe in him; and then they are too apt to betray an evil heart of unbelief. The children of Israel ought to have remembered, that it was not by any mistake of their leader, but by God's command, that they were come into this barren wilderness; for it is said in the text, "They journeyed according to the commandments of the Lord." This unthinking people did not look up to God, nor attend to his hand, but in their impatience murmured and exclaimed against Moses, the glorious instrument whom God was pleased to make use of to conduct them. They had not recourse to their Almighty Creator, in their distress; but went to Moses, and peremptorily insisted

on his providing water for their use: "Give us water, (say they,) that we may drink." Though these words proceeded from a wrong disposition; yet may we borrow them from the Israelites, and in a spiritual sense address them to Jesus Christ, saying, "Give us water, that we may drink." This our blessed Lord himself has permitted us to do. For it is not only to the Samaritan woman, but to every one of us, that he says, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." *

Moses briefly remonstrates with them, that their behaviour was very sinful; and says, "Why chide you with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?" But he did not think it advisable to enter into a long expostulation with this infatuated multitude, who were already seeking stones to assault him. He addressed himself to God; and entreated him not to revenge and punish such murderous intentions, but to give him direction and assistance in such a critical time. Now as Moses, in this instance, is a pattern of long-suffering; so we ought to imitate him, and possess our souls in patience.

God, by the intercession of his faithful servant Moses, is prevailed upon to work a miracle, to remove the people's distress; upon which their fury subsided. Moses was to go to a rock upon Mount Horeb. The omnipotence of God could have commanded the clouds and dissolved them in rain; or have caused a spring to gush out of the earth, with which the people might have quenched their thirst. But he was pleased to

* John, iv. 10.

bring forth water by cleaving the hard rock. Thus he not only gave a more manifest proof of his omnipotence, in accomplishing his design by such improbable means; but likewise intended to make the Israelites ashamed of their unbelief, and at the same time, to shadow out a future event of a remarkable nature. Moses was to strike this rock with the same rod, with which he had performed his wonders in Egypt, and had divided the waters of the Red Sea. "Take in thine hand thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river:" thus by recollecting the former miracle, Moses's faith might be strengthened, and the unbelief of the people confounded. We have here present,

1. Christ himself, in the pillar of the cloud, who says in the text, "Behold, I will stand before thee there, upon the rock in Horeb;" i. e. I will manifest myself in my glory, over the rock that shall be struck. It was by his power, that this miracle was to be performed. As he had before directed the flight of the quails to the wilderness, and caused them to fall among the tents of the children of Israel; so now he, in a wonderful manner, directs the course of the water to this rock.

2. The elders were to be witnesses of the miracle. The bulk of the people, by their unbelief, had rendered themselves unworthy of seeing this operation of the divine omnipotence.

In the presence of these spectators, Moses struck the rock with his rod, and in an instant there issued a copious stream of water.

If we would search deeper into the mystery of this remarkable transaction; St Paul throws light upon it in these words: "Our fathers did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock

that followed them; and that rock was Christ,"* The rock which Moses struck, typified Christ; and the water which flowed from the rock had also a spiritual meaning; hence it is termed by the Apostle, "A spiritual drink;" i. e. drink which typified something spiritual.

In several passages of the Old Testament, Jehovah, when described as a protector and deliverer of his people, is called a rock. Moses speaks thus of the Israelites. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked, and forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation."† A rock being hard and immovable, is a fit representation of the eternity and immutability of Christ, of his firmness and strength; and his being an asylum to some, and an offence to others. Those, who in confidence of faith flee to him for refuge, find protection. Thus in time of war, men seek safety amongst high rocks against the attacks of the enemy. But they, who through unbelief dash themselves against this spiritual rock, do it to their own destruction. Hence Christ is styled in scripture, "a rock of offence and a stumbling stone."‡ In the miracle at the rock of Horeb, we have a type of,

1. The sufferings of Jesus Christ; and

2. The abundant gifts of the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour has thereby acquired for us. The former is represented by striking the rock with the lawgiver's rod; and the second is typified by the plenty of water thus produced.

I.

The rock of Horeb derived its name from its aridity: it was a dry parched rock, which seemed but ill adapted

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* 1 Cor. x. 4. † Deut. xxxii. 15. ‡ Rom. ix. 32.; 1 Peter, ii. 8.

to supply a copious spring of water, to quench the thirst of such a numerous people. Thus, it is said of our blessed Saviour in his state of abasement, "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground."* His mean appearance, his obscure parentage, and other circumstances externally despicable, rendered him a rock of offence to his people; a stone which the builders rejected.

2. The rock out of which the water was to flow, was pointed out to Moses by God himself. In like manner, Christ was appointed by his Father before the foundation of the world, to be the Saviour of mankind, and the spring of living waters.

3. The glory of the Lord manifested itself over the rock which was struck in the pillar of the cloud: "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock of Horeb." Thus the visible human nature of Jesus, the rock of salvation, was personally united with the divine glory; which dwelt within it more essentially than it did in the pillar of the cloud. Nay, a divine glory displayed itself in Christ even in the lowest state of humiliation; for, notwithstanding all the indignities and insults that were offered him, the rays of divinity beamed in the eyes of the Roman officer who stood at the cross, so that he cried out, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

4. The rock on which God thus manifested his glory, was struck by his direction: so Jesus Christ, the rock of salvation, was wounded by the permission, and according to the pre-determinate counsel and will of God; who says by the prophet, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts."†

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* Isaiah, liii. 2. † Zach. xiii. 7.

5. The rock of Horeb was struck at a time when all Israel rebelled against the Lord and his servant Moses, and consequently little deserved so great a benefit. Thus the rock of salvation was smitten by God, and made a spring of living water, when Israel committed the greatest of sins, by reviling and lightly esteeming the rock of their salvation.

II.

We come, in the second place, to consider the water which flowed from the rock, and which typified the rich abundance of grace, procured for us by the sufferings of Christ.

1. As the water did not come forth until after the rock had been struck, and the glory of God had manifested itself above it; so likewise the Holy Ghost was not poured forth in a visible manner, till Jesus had felt the curse of the law, satisfied the justice of God, terminated his sufferings in death, and was again raised and received into glory. Hence the evangelist says, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."*

2. As the rock of Horeb yielded not merely a few drops, but whole streams of water, which allayed the present thirst of the people, and afterwards ran in the dry places like a river,† to serve them in any future exigency; so the rock of our salvation, being smitten and wounded, is become a copious spring of living water; sufficient to satisfy the whole Israel of God, in their pilgrimage through time into eternity.

Approach to this fountain, ye who still quench your thirst in the impure streams of sinful lusts, and drink

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* John, vii, 39. † Psalms, cv. 41.

iniquity like water. "If any man thirst," saith our blessed Saviour, "let him come to me and drink:" but this he spake of the Spirit," as the evangelist informs us.* These are the words of the Lord Jesus, who ardently desires your salvation. Let them not therefore be disregarded. Behold! for your sake he has suffered himself to be smitten and wounded; and by his meritorious sufferings has acquired for you the spirit of grace, which in his gospel you are freely invited to receive.

Come unto him, ye who pant after grace, as the hart panteth after the refreshing stream; be not deterred from approaching him from a sense of your unworthiness. Who could be more unworthy to receive water from the rock, than the seditious Israelites in the desert. Yet, notwithstanding all their murmuring, the mercy of God opened a copious spring of water even for these rebels.

Lastly, Come to the waters which flow from the rock of salvation, ye who have already experienced their enlivening virtue. Draw cheerfully out of his inexhaustible fulness, and then you shall never thirst.

PRAYER.

O our Saviour, whose merit is infinite, be pleased so to dispose our hearts that they may become partakers of the living waters of thy Spirit. Create in us a loathing of the polluted streams of sinful pleasures, and kindle in us an ardent thirst after thy grace. May we drink abundantly of the salutary springs of thy comforts, and with joy draw water out of the

* John, vii. 37, 39.

wells of salvation, till we arrive at those blissful regions, where we shall thirst no more, and where thou, O Lamb of God, who art in the midst of the throne, shalt lead us, and bring us to the living fountains of waters. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLOOD OF THE SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT A TYPE OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.

"*The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it "unto you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your "souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for "the soul.*" Leviticus, xvii. 11.

In our inquiry into the mystery concealed under the blood of the sacrifice, two points offer themselves to our consideration,

First, The blood of the sacrifice itself.

Secondly, The ceremonies observed respecting it.

The blood of those clean animals which were appointed for sacrifices, was the chief article in the whole Levitical worship. When a person by transgression of the divine law had deserved death, he brought in the stead of himself, such a victim as God had appointed; laid his hand on it, and confessed over it his crime. From that instant the victim was considered as if it had committed the crime, and deserved death; but the atonement was not made till the blood of the animal was shed, and poured at the foot of the altar.

Hence St. Paul says, that "without shedding of blood, there is no remission."* Now if we consider how many millions of victims were thus sacrificed, from the time of Moses, to that of our Saviour, first in the court of the tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple of Jerusalem; the immense quantity of blood shed in all those sacrifices, must fill us with astonishment.†

This blood of the sacrifices thus profusely shed was, under the Old Testament, accounted very sacred. No person, under pain of death, was to apply this blood to his own use; God having strictly enjoined that it should be poured out at his altar. Nay, in order to impress the greater awe and veneration for this blood of the sacrifices, it was likewise prohibited by the Levitical law, to eat the blood of any creature killed for common use. "Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood, I will set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among this people."‡ This injunction is likewise repeated in another place. "Thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which he hath given thee; the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roe-buck and as of the hart. Only, ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it on the earth as water.§ Commentators have produced many reasons, why the eating of blood was so

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* Heb. ix. 22.

† Josephus, in his history of the Jewish Wars, VI. ix. affirms, that 255,600 paschal lambs were killed in the Temple at Jerusalem, in one day, at the feast of the Passover.

‡ Leviticus, xvii. 10. § Deut. xii. 15, 16.

strictly forbidden under the old covenant. But God himself, who is the surest expositor of his own laws, has made known to us the cause. "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar, to make an atonement for your soul; for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul. Therefore, I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood." *

While the blood circulates in the bodies of animals they live; without it, animal life is at an end. As often therefore as the blood of a sacrificed animal was shed, the life of the victim was offered up to divine justice, and was considered as a ransom for the soul of the sinner. According to the rule of divine justice, "the soul that sinneth shall die." But God, in the ceremonial law, was pleased to permit the sinner to redeem his soul, by the life of a beast. Now an irrational animal is by no means an equivalent ransom for the soul of man; yet the blood of the beast, which was poured out at the foot of the altar, was accepted as a pledge of the blood of Jesus Christ, in due time to be shed for the sins of the world, and offered up to divine justice. As the blood of the sacrifice, or the animal life of the sacrificed victim, was accepted instead of the soul of the transgressor; so the Mediator's soul, which was separated from his body by a bloody death, was accepted at the divine tribunal, as the ransom for the souls of sinners who had deserved death, and became a sin-offering to atone for their transgression. When this was accomplished, and Christ had by a bloody death laid down his life as an atonement; the type of

* Leviticus, xvii. 11, 12.

the sacrificed blood was fulfilled. It was then universally proclaimed that God, in consideration of the blood of Jesus Christ his beloved Son, (which had been typified by the streams of blood shed in the Levitical sacrifices,) would forgive sins, and acquit sinners from punishment, on their repentance and belief of the gospel. The principal passages in scripture relating to this subject, are the following.

"This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, (for the infinite multitude of Adam's descendants,) for the remission of sins."* "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed; he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."† "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood."‡ "Much more then, being justified through his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."§ "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."‖ "But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ."** "Having made peace through the blood of his cross."†† "For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God!"‡‡ "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say his flesh."§§ "Ye know that ye were not re-

* Matt. xxvi. 28. † John, vi. 55, 56. ‡ Rom. iii. 25.
§ Rom. v. 9. ‖ Eph. i. 7. ** Eph. ii. 13.
†† Col. i. 20. ‡‡ Heb. ix. 13, 14. §§ Heb. x. 19.

deemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." * "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sins." † "He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." ‡ "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." § "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony." ‖ Thus the blood of Jesus Christ, and its powerful influence is set forth in the New Testament.

But in order to understand these passages of scripture, it is to be observed that under the name of blood, the Holy Ghost usually comprehends the entire obedience of our blessed Saviour. St. Paul uses the words blood and sacrifices, as synonymous terms. "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with blood, but the heavenly things with better sacrifices than these." ** This sacrifice, which Christ offered to his Father for our reconciliation, includes the prayers and supplications, the strong cries and tears, which he offered up in the days of his flesh; †† all the reproaches, the insults, and contradictions of sinners; all the pains and agonies of his body and soul; and lastly, his death on the cross, in which they terminated. St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, says of the blood of Christ, "Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things

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* 1 Pet i. 18, 19. † 1 John, i. 7. ‡ Rev. i. 5. § Rev. vii. 14
‖ Rev. xii. 11. ** Heb. ix. 23. †† Heb. v. 7.

than the blood of Abel." * The blood of Christ cries to God, not as the blood of Abel did, for vengeance on those who shed it, but, for atonement, reconciliation, and mercy on the human race. As often as his heavenly Father thinks on this blood, he must also think on the astonishing obedience of his Son, who shed it on the cross; on the outrages, and tortures which he endured; and consequently he is thereby powerfully moved to pour down upon us pardon, forgiveness, and every spiritual blessing.

The blood of Christ speaks likewise to men. It speaks to secure and bold sinners, going on in impenitence, and reminds them of the inestimable value of their immortal souls, which could be redeemed from destruction only by the precious blood of the Son of God. It represents to them the holiness and justice of God, which, for an atonement, has required such a ransom. Farther, it speaks to penitent sinners, who know their depravity, and are humbled for their sins. It represents to them the inconceivable love of God, which moved him to give up to a bloody death his only Son. It promises them the remission of all their sins; informs them that the wrath of God is appeased; his justice satisfied; and his mercy ready to receive into his bosom, and impart grace to every soul, that is sprinkled with the blood of Christ. Blessed is he, who with faith and obedience hears the voice of this blood speaking peace to his conscience. Though the blood of Christ implores mercy for us, and speaks better things than the blood of Abel; nevertheless, on those, who, instead of being moved by it to repentance, tread it under foot, and account the blood

* Heb. xii. 24.

of the covenant an unholy thing,* it will one day, still more loudly cry out for vengeance.

We now proceed to consider the ceremonies observed, with regard to the blood of the sacrifices, in the Old Testament; and these are chiefly as follow.

1. The shedding of the blood. This was done by slaying the victim that was to be offered; its throat being cut with a knife.

2. The receiving the blood. As the blood of the victim was shed, it was received into a vessel, which one of the priests held for that purpose.

3. The sprinkling of the blood. In some sacrifices, the blood was sprinkled on the horns or corners of the brazen altar.† In others, it was sprinkled on the horns of the altar of incense in the sanctuary.‡ Sometimes it was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant, in the Holy of Holies. Even the book of the law, and the people, and the consecrated vessels of the tabernacle were sprinkled with blood.§

4. The pouring out of the blood at the foot of the altar.‖

5. The carrying of the blood into the Holy of Holies, once a year, on the great day of atonement.

Let us, in the next place, consider the mysteries typified by these ceremonies. None of them were arbitrary or without a meaning; but the supreme wisdom, by which the whole Levitical service was instituted, had its views in these bloody sacrifices. As the sacrifice of the blood, in general, typified the blood of Jesus Christ; so the accompanying ceremonies

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* Heb. x. 29. † Levit. iii. 2, 13. ‡ Levit. iv. 7, 18.
§ Heb. ix. 19, 21. ‖ Levit. iv. 7.

likewise prefigured the circumstances that attended his great sacrifice.

1. The shedding of the blood of the victim, represented the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, of which our blessed Saviour says, "This is my blood which was shed for many, for the remission of sins." * Now the blood of Jesus was very copiously shed in his sufferings. It was shed during his agony in the garden; on the Mount of Olives, whither he went across the brook Cedron, the very stream into which the blood of the sacrifices was conveyed from the Temple. It was shed when he was cruelly scourged, and crowned with thorns; and at his crucifixion, when the nails were driven through his hands and feet. Lastly, it was shed by piercing his side with a spear, after his death.

2. The receiving the blood of the victim in a vessel, which was held by one of the priests, indicates the reverence which ought to be observed towards the blood of Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice which he offered. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of some who accounted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and as it were trod under foot the Son of God, and intimates the sore punishment of which such persons will be thought worthy at the last day.

3. The sprinkling of the blood. Of this ceremony the Jews make great account, and call it the root of the sacrifice; and St. Paul exhorts the Hebrews, to draw near, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." †

4. The pouring forth the blood of the sacrifice at the foot of the altar represents, with regard to Christ,

* Matt. xxvi. 28. † Heb. x. 19.

the abundant shedding of his blood on the cross, till the absolute separation of his body and soul. "He poured out his soul unto death,"* with the utmost willingness and zeal for the honour of God, and the salvation of mankind.

Lastly, The High-Priest, by entering with the blood of the sacrifices into the Holy of Holies, showed that Christ, after shedding his blood on the cross, would enter into the heavenly sanctuary, "there to appear in the presence of God for us."

Let us, then, comply with the apostolic exhortation: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say his flesh, and having an High-Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."†

Moreover, the blood of Jesus Christ has a particular use in which it differs from the typifying blood of the victims in the Old Testament. No person, under pain of death, was to taste of the latter; but Christ says, on the contrary, "Drink ye all of this."‡ Nay even death is threatened in the gospel, to those who will not partake of it; "Verily, verily, I say unto you,

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* Isaiah, liii. 12. † Heb. x. 19. ‡ Matt. xxvi. 27.

except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." On the other hand, life is promised to those, who drink it with true faith. "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." * This eating of the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood, is figuratively done in the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper, to which the Son of God undoubtedly here alludes.

PRAYER.

O Thou faithful and ever-living Saviour, we bless and praise thee for shedding thy precious blood on the cross, and for pouring out thy soul unto death, to redeem us from death eternal. Grant that we may never forget this inestimable benefit; and be pleased daily to renew the thoughts of it in our souls. Thou, O Saviour, by the shedding of thy blood, hast accomplished the work of redemption, so that there is no need that thou shouldest die again, and offer thyself, a second time. By one sacrifice of thyself, once offered, thou hast perfected all those who shall be sanctified. Give us grace, to make a faithful application of thy sacrifice, and gratefully to commemorate it in that sacrament, which thou hast instituted until thy coming again. Amen.

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* John, vi. 53—56.

CHAPTER III.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC, A TYPE OF THE GREAT SACRIFICE AND CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

" And it came to pass after these things, that God did " tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham! And " he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now " thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and " get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for " a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I " will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the " morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his " young men with him, and Isaac his son; and clave " the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went " unto the place of which God had told him. Then on " the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw " the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young " men, Abide you here with the ass; and I and the lad " will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. " And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and " laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his " hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. " And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, " My father! and he said, here am I, my son. And he " said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the " lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, " God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: " so they went both of them together. And they came to " the place which God had told him of, and Abraham " built an altar there, and laid the wood in order; and " bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon " the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and " took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the " Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham! " Abraham! and he said, Here am I. And he said,

" *Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing*
" *unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing*
" *thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*
" *And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold*
" *behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and*
" *Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for*
" *a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham*
" *called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh, as it is*
" *called to this day.** *And the angel of the Lord called*
" *unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said,*
" *By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because*
" *thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son,*
" *thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in*
" *multiplying, I will multiply thy seed as the stars of*
" *heaven, and as the sand that is upon the sea shore; and*
" *thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in*
" *thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, be-*
" *cause thou hast obeyed my voice.*" Genesis, xxii. 1, &c.

As the sacrifice of Isaac was one of the remarkable circumstances which prefigured the crucifixion of Christ, it will not be improper particularly to consider this glorious type. The Spirit of God has intimated, that several incidents which happened to the Messiah were prefigured in this transaction. St. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which he explains several types exhibited in the Old Testament, makes this observation. "By faith, Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure,"† or type.‡

* i. e. The Lord will see, or provide. † Heb. xi. 17. ‡ Εν παραβολῃ.

Here we see in what light Isaac is to be considered in this whole transaction, namely, as the type of Jesus Christ; who was the centre to which every part of the preceding divine economy tended, and the great antitype or substance of all the shadows of the Old Testament. This is the seed which was promised to Abraham, in whom all the earth was to be blessed; for the angel saith not, "And to seeds, as of many, but as of one. And to thy seed; which is Christ." * Our blessed Lord represents himself as the antitype of Isaac, and the rejected Ishmael as a type of the carnal Jews, when he says, "The servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the son abideth ever." † St. Paul again seems to allude to the account of the sacrifice of Isaac, when he observes in the Epistle to the Romans, that "God spared not his own Son;" ‡ which words remind us of those of God to Abraham, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." These intimations of the Holy Spirit are a sufficient warrant for our tracing in this remarkable transaction the mystery of Christ.

The road is already beaten for us; since from the commencement of the Christian religion, Isaac has been always looked upon as a lively type of the Messiah, and his sacrifice. Even the ancient Jewish church perceived the mystery of this transaction, and believed that the binding of Isaac, in order to be sacrificed, was a type of the Messiah, by the sacrifice of whom God was to be reconciled to the Jews. But the Jewish church afterwards totally apostatized from the faith of their ancestors, and expected the Messiah to appear as a temporal prince. The later Jews being

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* Gal. iii. 16. † John, viii. 35. ‡ Rom. viii. 32.

under this delusion, attributed the reconciliation of Israel to Isaac's being bound. Accordingly, the modern Jewish writings are full of the importance of this transaction; and in their devotions on every New-year's day, they beseech God that he will be pleased to think of Isaac's being bound, and that he will be gracious to them for the sake of his bonds. Thus that obstinate infatuated people ascribe to the type, what they ought to seek for in the great antitype. Blessed be God for that light which is risen on us in the gospel, by the help of which we see, in all the circumstances of the history of this transaction, a very great resemblance to the circumstances of the crucifixion of Christ.

The two principal persons mentioned in the history of this remarkable transaction are, Abraham and Isaac. The former of these was a type of the heavenly Father, and the latter of Jesus Christ his only begotten Son.

With regard to Abraham, he had such an uncommon tenderness and affection for his children, that it was with great difficulty and reluctance that he was prevailed upon to consent that Ishmael, though rude and petulant, should be turned out of doors. Much greater must have been the violence offered to his paternal heart, when he submitted to put to death his beloved and obedient son Isaac. Thus God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is love itself. He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should live; much less would he desire the death of his innocent Son, had not his justice required such a satisfaction. However, as Abraham, at the divine command, spared not his beloved son, but willingly prepared to put him to death; so likewise the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ determined to give his only

Son up to death for us, that in him should be accomplished what his wise counsel had before determined to be done. As Abraham, in his willingness to offer up his son at the divine command, gave the highest proof of his love to God; so the heavenly Father has given the highest proof of his tender love to man, since he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up a sacrifice for us all. "In this," saith St. John, "was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."*—Abraham himself carried the knife in his hand, in order to sacrifice his son; together with the fire to kindle the pile of wood under the burnt offering. In like manner, the heavenly Father has shown the rigour of his justice in his Son's sufferings, and pointed it against our Surety as a sharp sword; for it is written; "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."†

As to the other principal person concerned in this mysterious transaction, namely Isaac, he represents our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaac was the only son of his father, by Sarah, and consequently heir to all his possessions; a child whose birth had been promised long before, and whose coming into the world had been expected for several years. Christ likewise is the only begotten Son of the Father, whom God hath appointed heir of all things; a Son whose coming into the world was expected by all holy men for four thousand years, and was preceded by

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* 1 John, iv. 9. † Zech. xiii. 7.

many gracious promises; a Son who, like Isaac, was named from his birth, and, contrary to the usual course of nature, was produced by the divine power from the barren womb of a virgin, as Isaac was conceived in the dead womb of Sarah.—Isaac was a son for whom his father had the tenderest affection. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." In like terms the scripture speaks also concerning Jesus Christ. He is called God's dear Son.* The Father himself sent a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." † John the Baptist bore witness that, "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand," ‡ as Abraham gave all his possessions to his beloved son, Isaac.—Isaac was a very obedient son, who, instead of making a bad use of his father's affectionate tenderness, always honoured him with the most unreserved obedience and submission; and in this transaction more particularly, gave an astonishing proof of it in a transaction, at the very thought of which nature itself shudders. He patiently submitted without making any remonstrance against the will of God, and of his father. And though he was grown to years of maturity, (being supposed to be four and thirty years of age,) and therefore might easily have made his escape from his aged father; yet he suffers Abraham to bind him, to lay him on the wood, and proceed as he pleased. In the same manner also, might our Saviour have easily escaped from the hands of his enemies: he had not only sufficient strength in himself to procure his liberty; but also more than twelve legions of angels were ready at his

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* Col. i. 13. † Matt. iii. 17. ‡ John, iii. 35.

command, had he been inclined to make use of them. But the blessed Jesus was obedient to his Father, even unto death, the painful ignominious death of the cross.* Isaac was an innocent son, and though he was to be put to death by the divine command, had committed nothing worthy of death. And who was ever more undeservedly led to death, than the only, the beloved Son of God, who had always done what was acceptable to his Father, who was holy, innocent, undefiled, and separate from sinners; who knew no sin, and in whose mouth was no guile? Thus Isaac exhibits a lively type of Jesus Christ, the only, the beloved, the obedient, the innocent Son of God.

Among the circumstances attending the transaction, the following deserve particular notice.

1. The land of Moriah was the place, on which Abraham was to sacrifice his son Isaac; he was not offered up in his father's house, but at a considerable distance from it. A similar circumstance appears in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As he was the person typified by the offerings in the Old Testament, it might have been expected that he would have been offered up in the Temple, emphatically called the house of God. But as Isaac, the type of Christ, was directed to be sacrificed at a distance from his father's house; so was Jesus likewise to be sacrificed without the temple, his heavenly Father's house; and probably in the place appointed for the sacrificing of Isaac. The land of Moriah, which included a considerable mountainous tract in those parts, comprehended the Mount of

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* Philip. ii. 8.

Olives, and Mount Golgotha. Now as God was pleased to choose one of these eminences in the land of Moriah for this typical offering, it is probable that he chose the very spot on which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Isaac's great antitype, was afterwards to be offered up.

2. Isaac, in the way to the land of Moriah, conversed very affectionately with his father. "And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father! (where the Chaldean paraphrase uses the word Abba.) And Abraham answered, "Here am I, my son." The same filial affection shines forth in the Lord Jesus: his first and last sayings, on Mount Golgotha began with the endearing title of 'Father;' and his heavenly Father, though not in words, answered him in effect, by powerfully strengthening him to undergo his sufferings, as if he had said, 'Here am I, my son;' and at length received his soul into his hands.

3. Isaac carried the wood on which he was to be laid, and offered for a burnt offering. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son." Thus it is said of our Saviour, that he went forth bearing his cross, and thus he dragged towards the place of execution, that heavy piece of timber on which he was afterwards to be sacrificed.

4. Isaac was alone with his father the day on which he was to have been offered up; the two servants who followed them, being left at a distance. Christ, likewise, on the night preceding his crucifixion, dismissed his disciples, who fled away and were dispersed. Yet he

conversed with his heavenly Father, as he had foretold in these words: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that every man shall be scattered to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." *

5. Isaac was bound hand and foot; for it is said in the text, "And Abraham bound Isaac his son." Our Saviour's arms were not only, according to the Roman custom, bound to the cross, when he was to drag it up Mount Golgotha; but when he was lifted upon the cross, after it was erected, his hands were stretched out and fastened to it with cords.

6. Isaac was lifted from the earth, to be laid on the wood. In like manner Christ was lifted up on the wood of the cross, as he had foretold to Nicodemus; "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." †

7. Isaac was laid on the wood entire, and alive. Those beasts which were appointed for sacrifices, were first killed by the side of the altar, and dismembered or divided into several pieces. But Isaac was a perfect type or figure of that sacrifice which was to be lifted up on the wood alive, and of which not a bone was to be broken.—If we further consider the astonishing patience of Isaac, in submitting silently, without any contradiction or repugnance, it exhibits the very image of Jesus Christ, who amidst all the tortures he endured, did not open his mouth.

8. After Isaac had been for three days given up by his father to certain death, he was restored to him alive on the third day. Thus on the third day, Christ was

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* John, xvi. 32. † John, iii. 14.

also raised from the dead. What happened to Isaac in a figure, was fulfilled in the great antitype. Here indeed we may observe a deficiency in the type. For Isaac did not actually die, nor was he actually sacrificed; though Abraham had already taken the knife, and lifted his hand to slay his son. God was pleased to accept of this obedience of Abraham and Isaac, and presented to the father of the faithful a ram entangled in a thicket, which the patriarch killed and sacrificed instead of Isaac his Son. But Christ was really sacrificed. Here the divine justice would not accept of the will for the deed: for as there is no remission of sins without shedding of blood, it was necessary that the blood of Christ should be shed in reality. Thus did Jesus really and truly die, and is in reality again risen from the dead. There was none to release the blessed Jesus: no vicarious victim that could supply his place in this great propitiatory sacrifice; there was no creature in heaven or earth qualified to finish this sacrifice, which was to appease and satisfy the divine justice for the sins of mankind.

9. Isaac, who had been bound, was likewise released from his bonds, on the third day, by his father. In like manner, it is said of the heavenly Father, that he "hath raised his Son, having loosed the pains of death," (or, as they are called in the Psalms, 'the snares of death,') * and thus set our Surety at liberty; "it being impossible that he should be holden of death." †

10. Isaac returned alive to the servants of Abraham, and afterwards lived with his father. ‡ Thus Christ, after appearing alive to his disciples, returned to his Father,

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* Psalms, xviii. 5. † Acts, ii. 24. ‡ Gen. 22. 19.

in whose house he now dwells, being ministered unto and adored by all the angelic host.

11. After Isaac was, as it were, risen from the dead, he became the father of an innumerable multitude. He begat Jacob the father of the twelve patriarchs; through whom the race of Abraham was propagated, until at length it became as the sand on the sea-shore for number, according to the divine promise, which, after this transaction, was confirmed by an oath in the following words: "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." In like manner the prophet says of the Messiah, who died and rose again, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." * Thus Christ is become the father of an innumerable multitude of children, many of whom he has already translated to glory; and all the promises of God are, as it were, sealed anew and ratified by his resurrection. †

No reasonable man will imagine, that all these remarkable circumstances should thus concur fortuitously. Certainly, the hand of infinite wisdom appeared in the transaction, and so directed the several incidents as collectively to form a complete type or representation

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* Isaiah, liii. 10. † Heb. vi. 13—20.

of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. Let us therefore,

1. Admire the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises. By the crucifixion of Christ, he has actually accomplished what he had prefigured by this type several centuries before; and at the same time, has verified the saying of faithful Abraham, "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

2. Let us acknowledge the justice of God; since he would not spare his only, his beloved, his innocent, his obedient Son, when the sins of the world were imputed to him. Who does not in this proceeding see God's great hatred of sin, and his severity in punishing it? It should therefore impress a holy fear on our hearts, and remind us of the words of our blessed Lord, "If these things be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

3. Let us also adore the inconceivable love of the heavenly Father to the human race, who, as it were, did violence to his own paternal heart; sent his only beloved Son from his bosom, and for us men, and for our salvation, delivered him up to a painful and ignominious death.

4. Let us, in the last place, consider the inference which St. Paul makes on this occasion: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him, also freely give us all things?" Nothing is so great, but we may hope for it from so affectionate a Father. We may approach him with faith and confidence, since he is reconciled to us by the death of his Son. If God who raised Isaac from the dead in a figure, hath restored again to life his beloved Son as the antitype, and loosed

the bands of death with which he was bound; we may be assured that his love will not rest here, but will accomplish in us the whole scheme which it has planned. He will collect our scattered ashes; he will raise our bodies from dissolution, invest them with glory, and translate the whole man, body and soul, into the blissful mansions of his house, into which Christ, the great antitype of Isaac, is entered, in order to prepare a place for us.

PRAYER.

O heavenly Father! we adore thy truth and justice, and thine infinite love, which moved thee to deliver up to death thine only and beloved Son; that we might not be given up to eternal death, and appointed as sheep for the slaughter. May this amazing instance of thy love be ever present to our minds; and may it excite us to present ourselves unto thee a living sacrifice; and henceforth to live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again, and who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end! Amen.

THE END.

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